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THE PORCUPINE

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON



THE PORCUPINE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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The Porcupine. A Drama in three acts

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THE PORCUPINE

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON



New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1915

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By EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1915.

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To
LOUIS V. LEDOUX

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THE PORCUPINE

CHARACTERS

LARRY SCAMMON

ROLLO BREWSTER

STUART HOOVER

DR. BEN BAKER

RACHEL Scammon

ALMA Scammon

MRS. HOOVER

The scene is laid in Tadmor, a New England village. The action covers a period of three days.

ACT I

A comfortably furnished room in an old New England house. In the rear are two windows, with brown shades. Between them is an open stove, in which bright coals are burning. Well to the left is a door that opens into a vestibule, in the rear of which is another door that opens on the street. On the left, not far down, is a door that opens into a bedroom, which is now occupied by RACHEL SCAMMON'S convalescent child. Opposite, on the right, is the door of ROLLO BREWSTER'S study, and further down on the same side is another door. Well down in front is a rather large table, upon which are papers, books, writing materials, and a large lamp. To the left of the table is an old leather-covered reading chair and further to the left is an old-fashioned rocking chair. In the corner, on the right, is a book-case, and there are several small chairs. The room is dimly lighted at first by the winter twilight outside.

ALMA SCAMMON and **STUART HOOVER** are discovered standing near the stove—she to the right, he to the left of it. She is an attractive woman, past thirty, rather pale, and possesses a natural charm and vivacity of manner that has been subdued by a secluded and unhappy life during her later years. Her most obvious characteristics are her mobile features and a tendency to sarcasm in her manner and speech. She has suffered a great deal, but she doesn't mean that anyone shall know how much. **STUART HOOVER** is a good-looking young attorney, a year or two older than **ALMA**, with fine and regular features that do not suggest a great deal of initiative force. His voice and manner reveal too often his disappointment, assumed indifference, and occasional cynicism. He is well

dressed, and has put on his overcoat. He holds in his hand a rough cloth hat, which he strokes from time to time as he talks.

As the curtain rises, slow violin music is heard from the child's room on the left, through the closed door, and it continues to be heard throughout the following scene.

("Right" and "Left" are from the stage throughout the play)

ALMA

[Looking up from the fire]

Must you go, Stuart?

STUART

[Indifferently]

Must? I don't know that I must do anything—but remain a misguided imbecile for the rest of my life.

ALMA

[Frowning]

But, Stuart,—you shouldn't say such things to me.

STUART

I know it.

[Forcing a laugh]

"But you see, Alma, we've talked about the weather, and about Rachel, and about the boy, and the dog, and the cat. . .

ALMA

[With a sigh]

But, Stuart, can't you *do* something? Can't you make Rollo change?

[*With energy*]

Ever since poor Larry came back, Rollo has been cruel to him. . . . And I can't bear it much longer.

STUART

[*Smiling thoughtfully*]

"Poor Larry," did you say?

ALMA

Yes, I did. Is it strange that I should call him "Poor Larry," after Rollo's treatment of him?

STUART

Oh no, it isn't strange. Only, I was thinking.

[*He glances at the study door*]

Larry says, "Poor Rollo."

ALMA

How much does Larry know?

STUART

Oh, Larry knows a good deal.

[*Incisively*]

Among other things, he knows that I threw myself away ten years ago, and left you where you are.

[*She looks behind her*]

Yes, and about Rollo. Larry knows that Rollo is doing his best to follow in my tracks: to make himself the talk of the town, and to make me more ridiculous than ever.

ALMA

Stuart!

[She looks towards the window and scowls]

Why did that woman ever come to this place?

STUART

[Stroking his hat]

God only knows.

[Looking up at her]

Alma, I believe sometimes that you hate me—for marrying that woman. You may as well tell me the truth at last, and let me know.

ALMA

You needn't have said that, Stuart. For I came to understand, after a time, that she—your wife—brought something of a world that you and I had never known—something that I could not possibly have given you.

[Rather drily]

There were her good looks for one thing, and then there was her voice—and her singing. Compared with my poor little croak. . . .

STUART

[With some venom]

I don't think you can tell me anything about her voice.

ALMA

Very well.

[Seriously]

But I knew that you never loved her—really—even though you did marry her. Perhaps that is the reason why I forgave you—or one of the reasons.

STUART

You are good enough to say that, but I married her, all the same. She found out that I had some property, and then she found that she could lead me wherever she liked with her shape and her face and her ways, and her infernal music. . . . Oh, but what's the use?

ALMA

What a fright I must have been in those days.

STUART

Don't mind if I talk like a fool,—though, as I said before, what's the use? If it hadn't been for a few thousand dollars, she would have played for a time with me, just as she is playing now with Rollo, and then she would have let me go.

ALMA

You mean by that, I suppose, that she would have let you come back to poor little frumpy Me.

STUART

I'm glad you can laugh, anyhow.

ALMA

How can I keep from laughing—sometimes?

STUART

[Wearily]

Don't attempt it. Laugh all you can. Make everybody around you laugh. Make Rachel laugh.

ALMA

Poor Rachel! I wonder if she will ever laugh again.

STUART

Probably not—unless Larry makes her. That fiddle of his might be of some assistance if he would only stick to the Dead March in Saul.

[Glancing at the door behind him]

It's a good thing for the boy, anyhow.

ALMA

[As if frightened]

Do you know, Stuart, that the child seems to me to care more for his—his Uncle Larry—than he does for anyone in the house?

STUART

Yes. And I have thought that if you were in Rachel's place, you would go so far as to imagine, at any rate, a way out of all this.

ALMA

[Smiling]

Do you know what Larry calls you?

STUART

No, and I don't care—so long as he doesn't call me "Poor Stuart."

ALMA

He calls you Stuart, the blind man.

STUART

That must be an easy thing for Larry to say. And I suppose I was only quoting Larry when I said what I did about you and Rachel.

[Drily]

Larry sees a way out of everything—or he makes a fellow think so.

ALMA

[Eagerly]

What does he say?

STUART

Not much. He taps his rubber boots with that everlasting bamboo stick of his, and tells a fellow to cheer up. I could do as much myself, if I had his infernal assurance.

ALMA

But Larry can't see in the dark.

STUART

Perhaps he can.

ALMA

I'm afraid, Stuart, that Larry has always been too fond of short cuts.

[Smiling]

You know that he studied geometry once?

STUART

[Wearily]

I didn't know that Larry ever studied *anything*.

ALMA

[Still smiling]

He did; and when he learned that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, he said to me: "This is all the geometry that I shall ever need. You may learn the rest of it yourself, and teach it to the Wild Man of Borneo."

[The music ceases]

But Larry has stopped playing. He must be coming out.

STUART

[Looking past her to the study door, on the right, which opens]

No, it's Rollo.

[Distinctly]

Rollo is coming out. How are you, Rollo?

ROLLO BREWSTER *enters from the right. He is a schoolmaster, a few years younger than Larry, though not so in appearance, full blooded, good looking, but not in a very pleasant frame of mind. His voice is full and resonant and a little hard. He speaks, even when angry, as if with a trained clerical accent. He is dressed in black, with a frock coat, throughout the play, and his manner is marked by a singular lack of magnetism.*

ROLLO

How are you, Stuart?

[He looks at Stuart keenly, moves toward the table, stops, and puts his hand to his head]

STUART

[Drily]

Headache?

ROLLO

[*Carefully*]

Eye-strain.

STUART

I wonder if *my* eyes are strained.

ROLLO

[*Suspiciously*]

Do they trouble you, Stuart?

STUART

[*Distinctly*]

I have been using them lately.

ROLLO

You must be careful.

STUART

Yes. . . . We must all be careful.

ROLLO

[*Disturbed*]

Alma, don't you think it is time to light the lamp?

[*At the table, as he lights the lamp*]

What have you and Stuart found to say to each other?

ALMA

Oh, we were trying to think of a way to make Rachel happy.

ROLLO

[Unpleasantly]

Do you expect anyone to be happy in this house while that—that fellow is about the place?

[He indicates the child's room, from which there comes now a sound of lively music played softly]

ALMA

Do you mean Larry?

ROLLO

[Decisively]

I do mean Larry. I mean that fellow who ran away from home ten years ago and has now come back a vagabond. It was he who made his own mother mourn the day that he was born.

STUART

Are you sure of that, Rollo? And are you sure that you met him half-way when he came back?

ROLLO

[Frowning and listening to the music]

Oh, that everlasting fiddle!

ALMA

But you forget something, Rollo. Doctor Ben says that Larry and his fiddle will do more for the child than all the medicine that was ever made.

ROLLO

Indeed! Then Larry comes to us in the character of a musical prescription, does he?

ALMA

[*Calmly*]

He comes to us, Rollo, as our brother.

ROLLO

Thank heaven, he is no brother of mine.

ALMA

Your father married our mother.

ROLLO

Well, that was not my affair, was it?

ALMA

[*Hopelessly*]

No, Rollo, that was not your affair.

[*There is a strained silence, broken only by the fiddle in the next room. Presently the music ends abruptly, there is a sound of laughter as the door at the left opens, and LARRY SCAMMON enters. He is well but not heavily built, possessing unusual vivacity and high spirits and a chronic inability to take anything very seriously. He is dressed in a nondescript costume consisting chiefly of a blue pea-jacket and a pair of dingy rubber boots, into which a pair of old trousers are tucked. He has a certain fineness about him, in spite of his thoughtlessness and his rough exterior*]

LARRY

[*Tapping his boots with his bamboo stick*]

Hello, Rollo. And how are you, Stuart?

VOICE OF CHILD

[From next room]

Uncle Larry!

LARRY

[Closing door behind him]

No, you little satrap. You mind your mother and go to sleep.

[To ROLLO, laughing]

If I had known that you were listening, Rollo, I should have fiddled something classic.

[To ALMA]

Rollo thinks my devilish taste in music is going to be the damnation of us all.

ROLLO

[With hard lips]

We do not always say what we think.

LARRY

That was another good one, Rollo, and we must see that it doesn't die.

[Points at him with his stick]

"One accent of the Holy Ghost". . . .

ROLLO

May I ask if you are here to insult me? What are you, but a—

LARRY

Hush, my unnatural brother. Hush, and reflect. The truth is, Rollo, I'm a weaver. In fact, I'm the weaver

of a silver cord, whereby the golden bowl may not suffer destruction.

ROLLO

Are you a lunatic, as well as a vagabond?

LARRY

[Pointing again at ROLLO with his stick, and intoning]

Be careful, Rollo, and remember the text:

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken. . . ."

[He shakes his head ominously]

STUART

[Laughing]

Well, Larry, if you are going to begin one of your incantations, I'll get out.

LARRY

[Turning]

Are you going home, Stuart?

STUART

[At the door, wearily]

Sooner or later.

LARRY

You are a lucky fellow. We don't all have homes to go to.

STUART

[Slowly]

No, we don't. . . . Good afternoon.

[He goes out]

ROLLO

Larry, why do you dress yourself like a clown, and make yourself ridiculous in the sight of your neighbors?

LARRY

[*Undisturbed*]

Rollo, why do you carry yourself like an agent of the Almighty, and prove your unfitness for the office every time you open your mouth? Furthermore, will you kindly tell me why my neighbors—I like “neighbors”—persist in making themselves ridiculous before *me*?

ROLLO

Is that to be taken as a personal remark?

LARRY

Brothers may be neighbors, I suppose.

ROLLO

I beg your pardon, but you are not my brother. I would gladly have received you as a brother; but I could not, and I cannot, overlook your wilful disregard of all the dignities and decencies of Christian conduct.

LARRY

[*Whistles*]

You had better be careful, Rollo, for you must remember that I came to you in all becoming humility, and with no wilful disregard, as you call it, of anything whatsoever. On the contrary, I gave you every opportunity to be as decent and as dignified as Marcus Aurelius,—and somehow you didn't quite rise to the occasion.

ROLLO

[Wetting his lips]

I wonder if I can endure much more of this.

ALMA

[With a nervous laugh]

I am sure that *I* can't. You are not in your right mind today, Rollo, and you haven't been for some time. . . .

[Quickly]

Who's that?

[There is a light tap on the door, which opens enough to admit the head and shoulders of MRS. HOOVER, who laughs as she enters. She is a pretty woman, about thirty-five years old, with a slight but beautiful figure. She wears a close-fitting dress of dark blue with a waterproof cloak and hood of the same color. She has dark features and black hair]

MRS. HOOVER

[To the company, speaking with habitual rapidity and very much at her ease]

How do you do? . . .

[To ROLLO]

Why, Rollo, you look as if you were scared—and angry.

[To LARRY]

Have you been scaring your big brother, you bad Mr. Larry? Alma, my dear, how are you?

[Impersonally]

I've lost my husband.

ALMA

[Not much interested]

Stuart left us only a moment ago.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Laughing*]

I understand. He went around the corner, down to Doctor Ben's office. To smoke pipes, I suppose, and heaven knows what. Those horrible doctors do nothing all day long but smoke and drink and tell the most awful stories. They never cure anybody of anything. You don't go to Dr. Ben's, do you, Mr. Larry?

LARRY

[*Amused*]

I always consult a physician when I have alarming symptoms.

MRS. HOOVER

Then if you and Stuart are at all alike, he must have an alarming symptom every afternoon—at just about this time.

LARRY

You should put him in charge of Rollo.

ROLLO

[*Embarrassed*]

Will you excuse me, Mrs. Hoover, if I go back to my work?

MRS. HOOVER

Professional men are always excused.

[*She removes her cloak and gives it to LARRY. Just as ROLLO goes out, the door of the child's room opens and RACHEL enters very quietly. She is dressed in dark brown, with white collar and cuffs, and has at times a friendless and almost fright-*

ened manner. She is not obviously beautiful, but she has a striking face, usually very pale and pathetic. But her face is capable of easy illumination, and a certain suggestion of weariness that often marks her whole manner does not prevent her from revealing at times a great deal of intensity. She closes the door, watches ROLLO as he disappears, and comes to the centre of the room]

MRS. HOOVER

And here is Rachel. . . . You poor dear Rachel, how tired you look! . . . Oh, but I shouldn't have said that!

[With mock contrition]

Mr. Larry, please take that yellow stick of yours and beat me as hard as possible with it over my two blue shoulders.

[To ALMA]

I promised myself that I would never say that to her again.

[To RACHEL]

Forgive me, Rachel, and make Mr. Larry beat me as hard as ever he can. I mean it. I deserve it. How is the dear little boy?

RACHEL

[Giving Mrs. HOOVER a sharp look]

He is asleep.

MRS. HOOVER

I'm glad. It will do him good to sleep.

RACHEL

[Sitting down in the rocking chair]

I dare say it would do the whole world good—if the world could have sleep—and peace.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Laughing*]

I don't agree with you for one half minute.

RACHEL

I suppose not.

MRS. HOOVER

[*With energy*]

I should say so. Give me a little life and freedom, and the world for my own as I like it, and I'll warrant you that peace and sleep will take care of themselves.

LARRY

[*Amused*]

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hoover, but don't you think the Powers might consider that rather a large order to be sent to one address?

MRS. HOOVER

[*Promptly*]

I don't know. They give as much to some women. Why shouldn't they give it to me?

LARRY

[*Studying her*]

Perhaps you haven't asked them in the right way. The Powers are pretty particular sometimes, and they are just a little hard of hearing. Perhaps you haven't made them understand clearly what you want, and how much you are willing to pay. You mustn't be surprised, you know, if the Powers exact a little usury now and then, or

if they send you from time to time a copy of their double liability law, which is printed in large violet letters. I know, for I have seen it frequently. The whole thing may be unfair, from our point of view, but that doesn't seem to worry the Powers.

MRS. HOOVER

[Who has listened half-offended and half-bewildered]

How can you say such things to me?

[Laughing nervously]

How can you let him say such things, Rachel?

[RACHEL pays no attention to her]

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

You asked me a question, and I answered it as well as I could. I make it one of my rules to answer all questions as well as I can.

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing]

In that case, you might tell me how to make the Powers hear me from a little wilderness like Tadmor.

RACHEL

Are you coming to dislike this town, Louise?

MRS. HOOVER

Does Mr. Larry like it?

[To LARRY]

Do you?

LARRY

Yes, I find it rather restful. And I have been in need of rest for some time—for several days.

MRS. HOOVER

And what, for heaven's sake, is the matter with *you*? You look as if you might lift an elephant.

LARRY

Brain-fag—superinduced by over-appreciation. Alma, what the devil are you laughing at?

ALMA

I am laughing at *you*.

LARRY

[To MRS. HOOVER]

And you?

MRS. HOOVER

I was laughing at your boots.

LARRY

Do you like them?

MRS. HOOVER

I adore them.

LARRY

And the ground they walk on, peradventure?

RACHEL

[From her chair]

What do you silly people think you are talking about?

MRS. HOOVER

[*Patting RACHEL's head*]

You poor thing, we are trying to make you laugh.

RACHEL

[*With a slight shrug*]

If you keep on, you may succeed.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Rapidly*]

Rachel, you ought to be shaken to pieces. Did you ever roll a hoop when you were a child, or jump a rope, without having a nice dismal feeling that the twelve Apostles had their eyes on you and didn't more than half like what you were doing? Now, did you?

RACHEL

[*Patiently*]

You mean something by what you say, I suppose.

MRS. HOOVER

[*With a sharp laugh*]

Good Lord—yes!

ALMA

She is wearing herself out watching the child.

[*Going to RACHEL*]

You mustn't do it any more, dear, for there's no need of it. Doctor Ben says so, and he says that all sorts of things may happen to you, if you don't stop.

RACHEL

[Taking her hand and looking up]

Thank you, Alma, but you can't quite put yourself in my place.

[Strokes her hand]

That's all. I'll try to be more cheerful.

MRS. HOOVER

[To LARRY]

Why, she almost laughed!

LARRY

Of course. And she'll do it—presently.

RACHEL

Ah, you foolish Larry. I dare say that I shall be all right again—presently.

[She looks at LARRY and smiles, as if she pitied him]

LARRY

[Tapping his boot-legs]

Of course you will. And I wish you wouldn't call me foolish, for I give you my word that I'm the most serious person in all Tadmor. And that's a devil of a deal for any man to say of himself.

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing]

Rachel, aren't you and Alma glad that he has come home again?

LARRY

They are glad, but they aren't half so glad as Brother Rollo ought to be.

RACHEL

Please don't speak of Rollo in that light way, Larry, I don't like it.

LARRY

Light? My dear child, you discourage me. Now tell me something, if you can. Could it be possible for an erring scion of the house of Scammon to be better equipped than I am now for the instigation of brotherly love? I don't think so. But what does Brother Rollo do? He tells me to get out. And yet, I'm a human being; I live, and move, and have my several uses, and add my share to the fabric. Does Rollo do more than that?

[To MRS. HOOVER]

I ask you, Madam, does Rollo do more than I?

MRS. HOOVER

[Bewildered]

But I don't yet know what you do.

LARRY

Rollo is a teacher, and I'm a—I'm a weaver.

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing]

I don't understand you this afternoon.

LARRY

[Intoning]

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed." . . . Aha! He comes again.

[ROLLO comes out of the study. His face is very serious and his hair is strangely dishevelled. LARRY looks at him]

LARRY

How are you, Rollo? Your hair looks as if it had been drinking.

[MRS. HOOVER *turns away and laughs to herself*]

Have you finished that lecture you are writing?

ROLLO

No, I have not finished it.

LARRY

[*Cheerfully*]

No inspiration?

ROLLO

I think that I will take a short walk—in the open air.

[*He puts his hand to his head*]

LARRY

Why don't you walk down to Doctor Ben's and let him give you about three fingers of his elixir of life?

ALMA

[*Covering a forced yawn*]

It's nearly time for Doctor Ben to be here.

RACHEL

Hark!

[*The child calls from the sick room and she goes out hastily. They watch her until she disappears, and look at one another, frowning doubtfully. ALMA goes out quietly, on the right, while the others are talking.*]

MRS. HOOVER

[To LARRY]

Will she never understand that the child is out of danger?

LARRY

She will, unless I am mistaken.

[To ROLLO, with much good humor]

Well, Rollo, will you come for a short walk with *me*?

ROLLO

[Solemnly]

No, thank you. I have changed my mind.

LARRY

[Taking his hat from the table]

You know best.

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing]

Are you going too?

LARRY

[Amused]

For a walk.

MRS. HOOVER

I know about that. You are going down to Doctor Ben's. If I were a man, I should like to go along with you.

[To ROLLO, quickly]

Shouldn't you?

[He gives her a strange look that makes her laugh and cover her mouth with her fingers. She sits down and LARRY goes out grinning.]

MRS. HOOVER

[Wiping her eyes]

Won't you forgive me?

ROLLO

Louise!

[He takes her wrist and holds it]

MRS. HOOVER

Good gracious! But you did look so funny. . . . Ow!
You hurt.

ROLLO

Louise!

MRS. HOOVER

[Standing up]

Lean forward a little and let me do something to your hair, or I shall have another fit. . . . There! Before I did that, you looked as if you were crazy.

ROLLO

[Very earnestly]

Did you hear that call—from that room?

MRS. HOOVER

[Indifferently]

Yes, I heard the child calling for his mother.

ROLLO

[As before]

It was my child, and I thought only of you. And if all the children in the United States were to call out now together. . . .

MRS. HOOVER

[With a shrug]

There would be a most horrible noise. I don't like to think of it.

[Laughing]

Suppose we change the subject and talk about your brother Larry.

ROLLO

Please don't call him my brother. And for the love of heaven, have the humanity to cease from torturing me in my own house.

MRS. HOOVER

Oh! Is that the way you are going to talk to me? And are you so sure that the love of heaven is responsible for what you say?

ROLLO

Isn't the love of you the love of heaven? Haven't I been showing you and telling you for the past year what you are to me?

MRS. HOOVER

You haven't always been very tactful, if you mean that.

[Affecting injury and looking around the room]

You have no right to look at me in that way, and you seem to forget that you have three doors to watch. Besides you mustn't forget the lecture that you are writing.

[Narrowing her eyes]

Isn't that lecture more important than the love of heaven?

ROLLO

[With effort]

If you speak to me like this, I shall not be responsible for what I say or do. God knows if I am as it is.

MRS. HOOVER

[Leaning against the table and looking at him]

And this, you think, is love.

ROLLO

Think? You might at least be merciful.

[With more effort]

Do you believe me when I tell you that I love you?

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing easily]

I don't believe you know anything about me—or much about yourself.

ROLLO

[Wiping his forehead]

And you say this to me?

MRS. HOOVER

Yes; and I wish you would tell me—in the name of whatever you may choose to select—just what you think of us poor creatures who have so much hair on the tops of our silly heads and so little sense underneath it. Do you suppose we are all blind—that we never see anything at all? Do you suppose that your eyes could look just as

they do now if you really deceived yourself in regard to all this exalted affection of yours? Love? Love of heaven?

[She laughs at him]

You ought to get down on your knees this minute and say your prayers.

ROLLO

[Choking]

Louise!

MRS. HOOVER

[Moving about nervously]

Oh, I wish I had never come to this place! Some people are born to be unhappy, I believe, and for just nothing else. That may sound selfish to you, and I don't care much if it does.

ROLLO

[Feebly]

You speak as if you had had some great sorrow.

MRS. HOOVER

No, but I've been most horribly bored. If I had had a great sorrow, it might have done me good.

[With mild irony]

Have you ever had a great sorrow?

ROLLO

[Tragically]

Knowing what you know, you ask me if I have ever had a great sorrow.

THE PORCUPINE

MRS. HOOVER

[Touching his arm]

Why, you poor big bad boy, you are trembling all over.

ROLLO

[As before]

You may call it whatever you like, but it will kill me if you do not save me from it.

MRS. HOOVER

[Drily]

I beg your pardon, but it will do nothing of the kind.

[Looking into his face]

Your eyes are not the first that I have ever seen, and your voice is not the first that I have ever heard.

ROLLO

[Stares at her, hesitates, and seizes her tightly in his arms]

Do you know where you are?

[She nods indifferently]

You are in my arms. . . . And you smile.

[He kisses her]

MRS. HOOVER

[Finding a way to her face with her handkerchief]

Yes, and if you don't let me go at once, I shall have to laugh. I know I shall.

ROLLO

[Letting her go slowly]

What are you trying to do to me?

MRS. HOOVER

[With emphasis]

If you won't think me too familiar, I'll ask you the same question.

[Demurely]

Now you are angry with me, and you are thinking things about me.

ROLLO

The vital thing for me now is not what I think, but what I know. . . . Do you know what I know?

MRS. HOOVER

[Shaking her head]

No.

ROLLO

Then I shall have to tell you. Don't speak to me until I have asked you the question that I have tried to ask ever since I have understood what has happened to me. . . Louise!

MRS. HOOVER

[Nods slowly]

Yes.

ROLLO

[Seizing her wrists]

Will you go with me?

MRS. HOOVER

[Trying not to laugh]

Go where?

ROLLO

[Still holding her]

To any other place than this. . . . North, south, east, or west. . . . What have you now to say of love and sorrow? Do you think I know what they are like?

MRS. HOOVER

[Slowly]

No.

ROLLO

[As before]

For God's sake, then, do you yourself know what love is like?

MRS. HOOVER

I wonder if I do.

ROLLO

[Drawing her more closely to him]

Louise!

[He looks into her eyes for some time, and releases her only an instant before LARRY enters with DR. BEN BAKER. ROLLO is embarrassed and uncomfortable, but MRS. HOOVER does not appear to be disturbed. DR. BEN is thick set and heavy, with a rough brown beard that gives him a somewhat ferocious appearance, and he wears a large fur overcoat. He speaks in a loud, low pitched voice, with a growling accompaniment if he is irritated or displeased. His eyes are bright and piercing, and his manner suggests a man who is thoroughly genuine and rather impatient of too much tact and diplomacy. — He looks at ROLLO, grins, and then looks at MRS. HOOVER]

MRS. HOOVER

Why, Doctor Ben, how well you are looking.

DR. BEN

[Unbuttoning his coat]

I have to be well. And I suppose you know that you're looking pretty fine yourself these days.

MRS. HOOVER

Oh, go away. I've heard all that before. Don't you ever try to flatter a woman, for you'll only scare her to death.

DR. BEN

So be it, if you say so. But what's all this about Rollo's having a bad head? Has he been drinking? What's the matter with you, Rollo?

ROLLO

[Putting his hand to his head]

Merely a touch of eye-strain, I fancy. But I must go back to my work. Really, I must. Good afternoon.

MRS. HOOVER

[As he walks away]

Good afternoon.

[She smiles to herself and takes her wraps from the chair]

DR. BEN

[Smiling]

But what's all this, Mrs. Hoover? Are you going too?

MRS. HOOVER

[Giving her wraps to LARRY]

Of course I am. You can't expect me to stay and hear you make fun of Rollo.

[Turning to right]

Oh, is that you, Rachel?

[RACHEL enters from the child's room]

RACHEL

[Drily]

Yes, are you going?

MRS. HOOVER

At last. And you must remember not to wear yourself out. Good-bye, Mr. Larry, and Doctor Ben, and see that she doesn't wear herself out.

[She goes out and LARRY closes the door after her]

RACHEL

[With a sigh of relief]

O Ben, I'm so glad you have come.

DR. BEN

[Laying medicine case on the table]

Is the boy all right? Let me get out of this linen duster and I'll have a look at him.

[He lays his fur overcoat over a chair]

LARRY

We'll all have a look at him.

[He lays his hat and stick on the table and follows Dr. Ben to the left]

RACHEL

[Stopping him as Dr. Ben disappears]

Larry! . . . Will you promise me to be very good to the child—always?

LARRY

[Shaking her affectionately]

Of course I'll be good to him. Why do you say that again?

[He laughs, lets her go, and goes into the child's room, closing the door behind him]

[RACHEL, left alone, looks for some time at the closed door. Then she goes furtively to the table, looks quickly around, seizes the medicine case, opens it, and takes out a vial. She looks at it as if frightened and then goes quickly to the book case in the right hand corner of the room, stands up in a chair and hides the vial behind an old leather covered book on the top shelf. She comes down again, closes the glass door, and begins to move slowly towards the child's room. When she is about six feet from the door she stops, holds out both arms, and says, "LARRY!"—in a despairing voice that can just be heard. She is standing thus when Alma enters softly from the right]

ALMA

[Coming in wonderment to the centre of the room]

Rachel!

[RACHEL turns about quickly, gives ALMA a terrified look, and says nothing]

ALMA

[In amazement]

What in the world is the matter with you, Rachel?

RACHEL

[Putting her finger to her lips]

Hush!

ALMA

[Taking a step nearer]

But, Rachel! . . . What is it? What has happened?

RACHEL

[Choking]

Nothing. . . . I asked you to be quiet because I wanted to hear what Doctor Ben was saying.

ALMA

[Not convinced]

But there is no danger now, Rachel. Everybody in this house knows that.

[Hesitating]

And you—you know it yourself.

RACHEL

[Strangely]

Do you think so?

ALMA

[Troubled]

I don't know what to think.

RACHEL

[After a pause, her voice shaking]

Have you ever suspected anything?

[Moving slowly to the right, towards ALMA]

You needn't be afraid to answer me. . . . No, you needn't be afraid—now.

ALMA

[Slowly]

Do you mean—about the child?

RACHEL

[Looking back over her shoulder]

Yes.

ALMA

About—Larry's child?

RACHEL

[Choking]

Yes.

ALMA

You poor Rachel!

RACHEL

[Sitting down wearily]

No, Alma; that isn't what I need. I don't need pity. I don't want it. . . . Do you see how much I trust you?

ALMA

Of course you trust me. And I know what it is you want.

[RACHEL looks up at her]

Larry is what you want. Yes, you want Larry, and Larry's child wants his father.

RACHEL

[With suppressed anguish, after a pause]

Doesn't Larry belong to me? Haven't I a right to him?

[A pause. Both women look towards the child's room]

ALMA

Tell me, Rachel.

[Pause]

Does Rollo know that Larry's child is in that room?

[RACHEL holds ALMA's hand]

Does Rollo know that he is not the child's father?

RACHEL

[Calmly]

If he did, I don't know what he would do to me. Before Larry came back, I shouldn't have cared very much what Rollo did to me.

[Her voice breaks]

I suppose I was mad when I married Rollo. And you had better think so too. Don't try to say anything—for you don't know. You don't know.

[She leans forward and covers her face with her hands]

ALMA

You poor Rachel!

RACHEL

[Sitting up and brushing her eyes quickly]

No, don't say that again. I don't want pity. I don't want anything that I can ever have again. Listen to me, Alma, and try to understand what I say; and whatever you do, don't blame Larry. It wasn't his fault that I loved him so much. He didn't even know it—perhaps. He was young, and I was young, and there was nothing else in all the world for me but Larry. Did you ever hear of women saying they would cut their hands off for men

they loved? Well, I would have done that—and I would do it still.

[Pause]

Why does God make life so hard, I wonder, for those who mean to do no harm? I did great harm to Rollo when I married him—you don't have to tell me that—but I was mad when I did that. He wanted me, and I married him, for I was mad. I knew just enough to be afraid—and he wanted me—and I was mad—mad! . . . And Larry had gone away—and none of us knew where he was. . . . Yes, Alma, I was mad! . . . And I was alone. . . . I had no father or mother—and I was alone—*alone!* . . . I was mad! . . .

[*She rises quickly and seizes ALMA'S arm. She speaks with increased emotion*]

But you mustn't blame Larry, for he didn't know. If he had known, he wouldn't have gone away. He fought with Rollo's father—and that wasn't his fault either. He forgot about me, I suppose. He didn't know how much I needed him. He didn't know that there was nothing else in all the world for me but Larry. He didn't know that every night before I went to sleep I thought of nothing but Larry. He didn't know that every morning when I woke up I thought of nothing but Larry. And then there came a time when I didn't sleep—and then it was that I seemed to go mad with fear. . . . And then I married Rollo.

ALMA

[*Kissing RACHEL'S forehead*]

You poor, dear Rachel!

[*ALMA moves away towards the right, stopping to look back as she goes. ROLLO comes out of his study and meets her when she*

is within a few steps of the other door. They look at each other half suspiciously but say nothing. After ALMA goes out, ROLLO stands looking at RACHEL. He takes a few steps toward her and stops again as LARRY, followed by DR. BEN, comes out of the child's room. RACHEL sits down again]

DR. BEN

[Taking medicine case from the table]

Well, Rollo, how goes the battle?

[Grinning]

Headache?

ROLLO

[Putting his hand to his head]

Eye-strain.

DR. BEN

The best thing for you to do will be to take it easy for a while.

[Opening case and growling]

Hello! What the devil does this mean? What's become of my aconite?

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

You may search me.

RACHEL

[Rising and speaking nervously]

I think we have some in the house, Ben,—somewhere—
if you want it.

[Frightened]

Do you want it now?

DR. BEN

[Growling]

No, I don't want it. I want to know where it is. I must have left it somewhere, and that isn't my way of doing business, either.

[He scratches his head, and finally takes a vial from the case, pouring from it into a bottle that he has brought with him for the sick-room]

Well, Rachel, you may keep on giving him this stuff,—and try, for the good Lord's own sake, to keep from fretting your delicate little gizzard over him any longer.

RACHEL

[Eager to get away]

Thank you, Ben. Shall I give him some of it now?

[She goes into the child's room and closes the door]

DR. BEN

[Rummaging his overcoat as RACHEL goes]

Yes, if you want to. It won't hurt him.

[Lays down his overcoat on the chair again]

Well, that beats the devil himself.

[Shuts medicine case and puts it in overcoat pocket]

Rollo, I don't know that it's any of my business, but I'm going to say something.

[He looks towards door of the child's room]

Has it ever occurred to you that the women in this house aren't just what they ought to be—in all ways?

ROLLO

Are there better women in the world?

DR. BEN

[Getting into his fur coat]

Probably not. Oh, no,—their souls are all right. They'll go to heaven fast enough. The trick is to keep 'em from getting there a little too soon.

ROLLO

[Puzzled]

Do you believe, then, that Rachel is in real danger?

DR. BEN

[Biting a cigar]

Rachel isn't the only one to be considered.

ROLLO

[Frowning doubtfully]

Do you mean Alma?

DR. BEN

[About to scratch a match]

Do I smoke in this room?

ROLLO

[Impatiently]

Yes, yes, if you care to.

[Pause]

Do you know, Ben, that I have sometimes asked myself just what is the matter with Alma?

DR. BEN

[Half way to the door]

Well, Rollo, asking yourself is better than not asking anybody, and it may do a whole lot of good.

ROLLO

[*Slowly*]

Perhaps she needs a change of air.

DR. BEN

[*Blowing an upward cloud of smoke*]

Yes, that's what she needs—a change of air.

[*He sighs heavily*]

And now I'll take a ride to the edge of the county and have a look at old man McGillicuddy's foot.

LARRY

Chick McGillicuddy? Is he still alive? When do you expect to get your pay?

DR. BEN

[*Putting on his gloves*]

Never.

LARRY

[*As Dr. Ben is going out*]

I say, Ben, you might send McGillicuddy's bill to me.

DR. BEN

[*With a short laugh*]

All right. I'll do it.

[*Exit.*]

[*ROLLO sits down at the table and pretends to read a newspaper.*]

LARRY watches him and smiles]

LARRY

There's nothing in it, Rollo, and the print isn't very good.

[*ROLLO looks up, scowling*]

I was thinking of your eyes.

[*ROLLO puts back the paper slowly and looks at LARRY*]

ROLLO

[Coldly]

You may be right.

LARRY

Doctor Ben is rather a good sort, Rollo, in some ways.

ROLLO

For a creature of instinct, yes.

LARRY

Hum! So the mercury is falling again. Why do you let it fall, Rollo?

ROLLO

It seems to me that you require a great deal of explanation.

LARRY

[Tapping his boots]

Which means, I suppose, that you don't like my coming here to be fed. Well, Rollo, if that's what's troubling you, let me tell you that I have come back for reasons that are different from any that you seem to have invented. For I came back in the hope of being of some definite service to you, and incidentally to find out what friends I might have left in Tadmor. Now you know pretty well who my friends are, and you know that you are not one of them.

[ROLLO stands up, and puts his hands to his head]

Not yet, I mean.

[Very distinctly]

And you may know also, or you may not know, that you are the talk of the town.

ROLLO

[Glares at LARRY and goes to the door]

Will you kindly leave this house?

[Throws the door open]

Do you hear me?

[More loudly]

I ask you to get out of this house and out of my sight. If you are in want, I will give you money to buy food and clothing, but never again in this house.

[RACHEL appears suddenly from the child's room and stands looking in a frightened way at the two men. LARRY stands near the rocking chair]

RACHEL

[Trembling]

Was that your voice, Rollo?

ROLLO

[Angrily]

It was.

RACHEL

[Trembling]

You—you told Larry to go!

ROLLO

This is none of your affair, Rachel, and you will please go back to that room.

RACHEL

[Still trembling]

You told Larry to go!

ROLLO

I did, and I must ask you again to do the same.

[He moves towards her, and she moves towards LARRY]

RACHEL

You told Larry to go! . . . Larry! what is it?

[She lays her hand on LARRY'S arm]

ROLLO

Rachel, you are my wife, and this is my house.

RACHEL

[To LARRY]

But what is it!

LARRY

[Clearly]

Wait a minute, Rollo. This house is yours, if you insist upon having it.

[Smiling]

We won't go into that now. For the rest of this business, the fault is partly mine, I confess; and I owe you, in spite of your late courtesy, a few words of explanation. Therefore I must ask you, Rachel, to leave the two of us together for a little while. Rollo makes mistakes now and then, like all the rest of us, but this time he is right in asking you to go away. You trust me, I hope?

RACHEL

[Bewildered]

Yes, Larry, I trust you. But I don't know what you mean.

LARRY

[Patting her shoulder and smiling]

Neither does Rollo—quite. My purpose is to make him know—before he drives me away forever. You needn't be at all scared. Now go away.

[RACHEL moves slowly towards the child's room]

ROLLO

[Closing the vestibule door]

Your request appears to be reasonable, and I will listen to what you have to say.

[There is distinct hostility in his manner]

LARRY

[To RACHEL, who hesitates at the door]

Rachel?

RACHEL

[Looking from one to the other]

Yes, Larry.

[She goes out slowly, closing the door silently]

ROLLO

[Half way to the table]

Well, I am waiting.

LARRY

[Sitting in rocking chair and facing him]

The whole town is waiting.

ROLLO

[Standing with his hands behind him]

No more of that.

LARRY

And the whole town is saying things, Rollo.

ROLLO

[*With false irony*]

Well—what things?

LARRY

The town is saying, among other things, that you are killing your wife.

ROLLO

[*Sitting down heavily*]

Do you mean to say that you have heard talk about. . . .

LARRY

[*Distinctly*]

Yes, I've heard a lot of it. I heard the first of it in Chicago.

ROLLO

For the love of heaven, Larry, don't make a joke of this.

LARRY

[*Tapping his boots*]

Joke? I should say not. You see Rollo, I was sitting one afternoon in my Chicago office, looking out over the town and thinking over my not altogether creditable career, when my partner Fillson came in and began to talk. He's a good talker—Fillson. He had just returned from a trip to these parts, and it transpired that he had the devil and all to talk about—including yourself.

ROLLO

Fillson? I seem to remember that name.

LARRY

Very likely, for you met him less than a year ago. He came here at my suggestion to have a look at Appleton's Ledges, with a view of possible quarrying. Nothing came of that, however.

ROLLO

[Puzzled]

But what have you to do with granite?

LARRY

[Laughing]

Nothing. But when it comes to showing other fellows what to do with it, Fillson insists that I have not lived in vain. In fact, I suppose I may say that some of the stunningest huts in Chicago are due to Fillson—and to me.

ROLLO

[Getting up and going towards the stove]

Are you an architect?

LARRY

I might say so, by straining a point.

ROLLO

I knew nothing of this.

LARRY

Well, no matter about it now. Whether I am rich, or poor, or so-so, is of little consequence—compared with Rachel and Alma.

ROLLO

[*Amazed*]

Rich?

LARRY

[*Laughing*]

Not at all, as the word goes nowadays. But aren't we forgetting Rachel?

ROLLO

[*Protesting*]

By no means. But—you see. . . .

LARRY

[*Tapping his boots*]

Of course I see. I can't very well help seeing. But the most important question now is, if you will pardon me, not so much what *I* see as what *you* see. With Rachel wearing out, and with Alma in a tuberosé way, don't you begin to see that this little affair of yours with—the Blue Lady—

ROLLO

Stop!

LARRY

[*Calmly*]

You mean, *must* stop. You left out a word. And you may as well know that Stuart Hoover, whatever you may think of him, would have had you over the coals long ago if it hadn't been for Rachel's feelings. I don't know just how much longer he'll wait.

ROLLO

[*Wiping his forehead*]

Does Ben understand this?

LARRY

Didn't you hear what he said before he went out—about Rachel and Alma?

ROLLO

[*With evasion*]

Ben would like to marry Alma himself.

LARRY

Well, he won't. And so you won't have to worry any more about that.

ROLLO

[*Hesitating*]

What does Ben say about—about *me*?

LARRY

For the moment, Rollo, I'm afraid that Ben doesn't see a very conspicuous niche for you in the halls of heroic fame.

ROLLO

[*Wetting his lips*]

Then you give me to understand that I am a coward in men's eyes, do you?

LARRY

Did I say that? Aren't you a soldier in the army of the—what's his name?—the Great Uplift?

ROLLO

[Brokenly]

There was a time when I could say so, but God knows what I am today.

LARRY

You still carry the banner.

ROLLO

[Bitterly]

Yes—I still carry it.

LARRY

Why don't you pass it on to some one else?

ROLLO

[With difficulty]

Because I can carry it still. Yes, and I can fight, even though I be a wounded man.

LARRY

That might sound rather well, Rollo, if only you could say it without stopping to swallow.

ROLLO

[After an uncomfortable pause]

Well then, if you must know, there is another reason.

LARRY

I thought so.

ROLLO

[Earnestly]

You see me in a bad light now, Larry—I know that. But—well, listen. I married Rachel, and I did everything

in my power to make her happy until I realized that all my efforts, all my love, all my devotion, were thrown away. I did all that a man could possibly do. And that marriage, I tell you, was the result of her coming to me of her own accord, and telling me that she was so unhappy where she lived that she begged me to take her away. You know that I had given up all hope of ever having her for my wife, and therefore you can partly imagine what my surprise and happiness must have been when I realized, or thought I realized, the truth.

[Clutching LARRY'S arm]

But you cannot ever imagine what an inferno it was for me when I found that I had married a porcupine instead of a woman.

[He moves backward a few steps and wipes his forehead]

LARRY

[Worried and puzzled]

Do you call Rachel a porcupine?

[He ends with a forced laugh]

ROLLO

I don't know what else to call her. Whatever she is, she is something that isn't human. Whenever I go near her now, she seems to wear an armor of invisible knives. And I tell you, Larry, they cut. They cut deep.

[Pause]

Have I thrown any new light on myself?

LARRY

[Slowly]

Yes—you have.

ROLLO

[Bitterly]

Good, or bad?

LARRY

[Slowly]

New.

ROLLO

[Throwing up his hands]

It may be new to you, Larry, but heaven knows it's old enough to me.

[Losing himself]

Is it altogether strange that I gave out at last? What if I *have* made a fool of myself with another woman? What if the whole town *is* waiting? Haven't I waited? Haven't I prayed, and suffered, and starved? Do you understand what I am saying?

LARRY

[Heaves a long sigh and sits down again in the rocking chair]

Every word of it.

[Looking up]

I'm sorry for you, Rollo, but before I can be of any spiritual or material service, I'm still very much afraid that you'll have to change your ways.

[Calmly but incisively]

If we are going to have a small-town Don Juan in the family, he must throw away his banner of light, or I go back to Chicago.

[He holds his stick crosswise against his knee and watches ROLLO]

ROLLO

[In despair]

Don't use your advantage over me now, Larry. Don't remember what I may have said to you when you came back—for you came back at a time when I was in no condition to be tested. Besides, I could have helped you—if you had needed help—and I—I would have helped you. . . . But no man can help *me*, now.

LARRY

That remains to be proved. In the meantime, Rollo, I wish you would say nothing about—Chicago. You know what I mean—my clothes, and all that . . . I tell you, Rollo, there's a way out of this.

ROLLO

[Putting his hand to his forehead]

There is only one way out, and that will be long and hard and bitter.

LARRY

[Getting up and touching ROLLO'S shoulder with his stick]

My dear fellow, there is altogether too much finality in your make-up. Now I believe in ways out of places. The more I consider this world, and its damnable nests of misery that might be cleaned out by the exercise of a little ordinary intelligence, the more do I believe in ways out of places. Take my word for it. The ways are here, and we are here to find them. And don't, for God's sake, think the stars in their courses are against you. If you begin to do that, you may come to enjoy it; and that's a good deal worse than being dead.

[With an encouraging laugh]

Rollo, you speak as if this little provincial tangle of yours were going to be the end of the world.

ROLLO

It might as well be, so far as I am concerned.

LARRY

So this is how the wounded warrior fights.

ROLLO

[Throwing up his hands]

Forgive me, Larry, but I cannot listen to you any longer. If you understood my situation a little better perhaps I might listen. I don't know.

[He begins to move towards the study door]

LARRY

Haven't you told me your story?

ROLLO

It means nothing to you.

LARRY

[Smiling]

Come, come! That isn't fair.

ROLLO

But it's true, all the same. . . .

[Looking down]

Besides, there is something else.

LARRY

[Frowning]

Something else? Is there never to be an end to this story of yours?

[He takes ROLLO by the sleeve]

ROLLO

There will be an end sometime. Now let me go.

LARRY

[Still holding him]

But you mustn't leave your story half told, if you expect me to do anything.

[Laughs suddenly, after a pause]

It isn't possible, Rollo, that you suspect me of taking too much interest in your Blue Lady on the Hill?

ROLLO

[Putting up his hands but not freeing himself from LARRY]

O Larry, let me go! Let me go!

LARRY

[Laughing with unconscious roughness]

Rollo, will you be here tomorrow afternoon? I may be able to tell you something.

ROLLO

Yes, yes,—but let me go.

[He goes backwards towards the study]

LARRY

[Still holding him]

But, Rollo—

ROLLO

[Tearing himself free and plunging into the study]

Let me go!

LARRY

[Laughing]

But, Rollo! . . .

[The curtain, falling rapidly, closes the scene with LARRY'S last word]

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same room on the following day. DOCTOR BEN is standing near the table, looking at ALMA, who is also near the table, to the left. DOCTOR BEN has his hands in the pockets of his fur overcoat and he is chewing an unlighted cigar. After a pause he takes the cigar from his mouth and addresses ALMA with a good natured but sincerely disappointed growl.

DR. BEN

By George, Alma! I wish you would tell me why it is that women don't like me.

ALMA

[Smiling]

But they do, Ben.

DR. BEN

Bah! You don't.

ALMA

But I do, Ben. Really I do. I always did, and I always shall.

DR. BEN

[Growling]

You don't like me well enough to marry me.

ALMA

[Biting her lip]

That is something entirely beyond our control.

DR. BEN

[With a heavy sigh and a gesture of despair]

It seems to be beyond mine, fast enough. I wonder why it is.

ALMA

[Almost laughing]

I know some women who would jump at the chance—if they could have it.

DR. BEN

Bah! So would *I* jump—the other way.

[Growling]

You know what I mean. I mean women like *you*.

ALMA

[Seriously]

Ben, you have no right to speak to me like this again.

DR. BEN

I suppose you are right.

[Shortly]

What's the good of it?

ALMA

None whatever.

DR. BEN

That's evident enough. But somehow, Alma, I can't let you go—entirely. You see, I've got so used to being turned down by you, that—

ALMA

O Ben, Ben,—don't!

DR. BEN

In your eyes, Alma, I suppose I'm something between a chimpan-zee and a nigger minstrel. You don't think I'm good for much, but still you rather like me—sometimes. I've no doubt you say to yourself that I'm as funny as a Newfoundland dog—with a biscuit on his nose.

ALMA

[Laughing]

That will do, Ben. . . . Did you find your aconite?

DR. BEN

[Growling]

No, I didn't. I asked Rollo if he had swallowed it for his eye-strain, and he said he hadn't.

[Grinning]

By the way, how *is* that eye-strain of his?

ALMA

Better, I should say.

[Looking towards the study]

Rollo and Larry have been shut up in there for the past hour, and I've heard Larry laughing three or four times as if he would die.

DR. BEN

[Looking towards the study]

That's good; you don't laugh enough in this house.—Well, Alma, don't be too hard on me, and don't forget that I'm not the worst fellow in the world—or the most unfortunate.

[She follows him towards the street door]

Anyhow, I'm better off than poor old Stuart, with that imported musical houri of his to keep him guessing.

[ALMA shakes her head]

That's so—I beg your pardon. All right, and tell Rachel not to worry any more about the boy. In a day or two he'll be trying to eat everything in sight—including his mother. Good-bye.

[He goes out with considerable noise and ALMA goes to the window at the left of the stove. As she stands looking out, LARRY enters from the study and watches her from the middle of the room. He takes his stick from the table]

LARRY

Hello, Alma! What are you doing?—trying to freeze your nose off?

[They go towards each other. He takes hold of her ears and makes as if to bite her nose]

ALMA

[Smiling]

You don't mean to let me forget that you are my Brother Larry, do you?

LARRY

[Still holding her ears]

Not if I can help myself. Did Ben ask you to marry him?

ALMA

Why should he, when he knows that it wouldn't do any good?

LARRY

What else did he talk about?

ALMA

[Rubbing her ears]

Oh, about you,—and about Stuart, and Stuart's wife.
He called her an imported musical houri.

LARRY

[Laughing]

Oh, he did. . . And yet, you know, this same Doctor
Ben isn't the worst fellow in the world.

ALMA

[Drily]

So he has told me, many times.

LARRY

[Grinning]

What else did he tell you?

ALMA

Am I on trial for my life?

[RACHEL enters quietly from the left]

LARRY

Possibly.

[He does not see RACHEL]

ALMA

And Rachel too?

[She looks at RACHEL and tries to laugh]

RACHEL

What are you saying about Rachel?

ALMA

Larry says that we are all on trial for our lives.

RACHEL

[Slowly]

No; Larry is not on trial for his life.

[Despairingly]

Why do you grown-up people talk such nonsense?

LARRY

[To ALMA]

You might repeat some of Dr. Ben's nonsense to Rachel.

RACHEL

[Sitting down and speaking with laborious determination]

No, Alma, you will do nothing of the sort, for I am not interested in Doctor Ben's nonsense. You will leave Larry and me together a little while, for I wish to ask his advice about something.

[ALMA gives her a searching look]

Is Rollo in there at work?

LARRY

He'll have to work—if he's to have that lecture ready on time.

ALMA

[To LARRY as she moves to right]

Then my trial isn't coming off just yet.

RACHEL

[Quietly]

There will be plenty of time for that, my dear.

ALMA

[Looks at RACHEL and frowns unhappily]

All right, Rachel. I'll go.

[She goes out, as if with reluctance, through the lower door on the right]

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

Well, Rachel, how are you?

RACHEL

[As if afraid]

Oh, Larry, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say.

LARRY

Why—what do you mean?

RACHEL

I mean, Larry, that I can't—forget.

LARRY

[Tapping his boots and looking at them]

Do you mean that boy and girl love-affair of ours—years ago?

[Without conviction]

Isn't life too short for that?

RACHEL

[Putting her hands to her eyes]

Don't Larry! Don't say that again! It would be cruel.

LARRY

[Getting a chair and sitting down before her]

I wonder if I understand what you mean?

RACHEL

[Looking at him]

You do, Larry. You must.

LARRY

[Rapidly, but with obvious effort]

Rachel, I can't bear to see you unhappy like this. I can't bear to come back and find you as you are now. It isn't reasonable. It isn't right.

RACHEL

[Echoing his first words]

You can't bear to see me unhappy? . . . Oh, my God!
[She leans forward and covers her face with her hands. Her body trembles]

LARRY

[Very distinctly]

Rachel, how much do you think we know about what has happened, at one time or another, in the lives of the best and happiest people on earth?

RACHEL

[She sits up again, touches her eyes quickly with her handkerchief and gives a sigh of despair]

Why do you say people, when you mean women?

LARRY

All right, then. I'll say women.

[He stands up and looks down at her thoughtfully]

So it is your memory of me that has been standing between you and Rollo all these years. . . .

RACHEL

[More calmly]

You heard what I said. . . . I said that I can't forget. And you speak to me of boys and girls. . . . Oh, I wish I were. . . .

LARRY

[Quickly]

Oh, no, you don't wish you were dead. I won't let you. And now I want to ask you something.

RACHEL

[Looking at him sorrowfully, her lip trembling]

Very well, Larry. I came to tell *you* something—but I can listen.

LARRY

Are you sure, Rachel, that you have always been as good to Rollo as you might have been? Have you been—well, have you always been quite fair to him?

RACHEL

[Painfully]

What do you think you mean by saying that? . . . I wish I were dead!

LARRY

Do you feel better now that you have said it?

RACHEL

[As if struck]

Larry, you never spoke to me like that in all your life before.

LARRY

I'm sorry, Rachel. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

RACHEL

[Hopelessly]

You didn't mean to hurt my feelings! . . . What are you men made of?

LARRY

[Shaking his head and smiling faintly]

Poor material, as a rule. About the best that some of us can do is to weave a silver cord that will keep the golden bowl from going to smash. You don't want the golden bowl to go to smash, do you?

RACHEL

Can you talk to me like this—after going away from me—ten years ago?

LARRY

[Tapping his boots]

Rachel, when I ran away from home, I was just about half crazy. My mother had been dead for more than a year, and after that infernal row with Rollo's father. . . .

That man was a born devil, I tell you. He killed my mother with his damned temper, and you know that as well as I do.

RACHEL

[Looking up at him]

Yes, Larry, I'm afraid you are right. But if you had known how much I needed you then, Larry, you would never have gone away. You couldn't have gone. But you didn't know, and you couldn't know. And all you know about me now is that I have changed. I know that I have changed, Larry. God knows I know it. I know that no one likes me any more—except Alma—and her love is more than half pity. Pity is bad enough, Larry, but it isn't so bad as your trying all the time to make me laugh. Forgive me for saying this, but you must understand sometime, or I shall die.

[With a sad smile]

When you see me now, Larry, I suppose it's hard for you to believe that I was ever the same Rachel you used to know, and used to like. *Do* you find that hard, Larry? . . . Tell me.

LARRY

Come, come, Rachel. You know I can't stand this. I won't have it. Do you think I have no feelings?

RACHEL

No, Larry, I don't think that. I know you too well for that. I know you don't mean much by most of what you say to me, but there are some things you must never say again. You must never talk again of what has passed

between us as if it were dead, and out of our lives, and a thing to be forgotten.

[With a sobbing cry]

Forgotten! . . .

[Her voice breaks, and she speaks with greater difficulty and with increasing emotion during the rest of the scene]

LARRY

Do you still need me, Rachel?

[RACHEL leans forward in her chair, her body shakes with grief]

Do you still need me, Rachel?

RACHEL

[Trying to control herself]

It's too late now—for you to ask me that. You cannot help me now.

LARRY

But you were going to tell me something.

RACHEL

[With difficulty]

Yes—yes. . . . I was going to tell you something. . . .

LARRY

[With an assumption of his old assurance]

My dear Rachel, you are not going to be too sure of what I can't do. Just remember that and . . .

VOICE OF THE CHILD

Uncle Larry!

LARRY

[*Insisting*]

Will you remember that?

RACHEL

[*Looking straight ahead*]

Yes, Larry. I'll remember.

[*Looking up at him*]

Now go away. Please go away! Your—the child wants you. . . . Go! Go! Go!

LARRY

[*Moving to the left*]

I know it. He wants me to fiddle to him. You'll remember what I said?

RACHEL

[*Faintly*]

Yes, Larry.

[*She watches him as he goes into the child's room, leaving the door ajar. Presently the sound of lively music is heard through the door. RACHEL listens in a state of unhappy abstraction as ROLLO enters from his study. His face is more cheerful than it has been before and there is a clumsy but well-meaning kindness in his words and in his manner*]

ROLLO

[*Coming near to RACHEL*]

Well, Rachel, Larry is making more music for us.

RACHEL

[*Without moving*]

Yes.

ROLLO

He seems to be playing with more expression than usual.

RACHEL

[Staccato]

Yes, I was thinking of that.

ROLLO

You look tired, Rachel.

RACHEL

[Twisting her shoulders]

Does anyone ever miss an opportunity to tell me so?
Who is that?

[MRS. HOOVER enters after a quick tap on the vestibule door. She is dressed as in Act I.]

MRS. HOOVER

[Coming into the room]

O, is it you—you two?

[To ROLLO]

How are the eyes?

[Looking to the left]

And what in the world is the matter with your funny Mr. Larry? He fiddles like a reclaimed sinner.

[Pause]

I know that tune.

[She beats time with her hands and comes half dancing towards RACHEL, singing and laughing as she comes]

“Roy’s wife of Aldivalloch,
 Roy’s wife of Aldivalloch,—
 Wot ye how she cheated me,
 As I cam’ o’er the braes o’ Balloch?”

I haven’t heard that tune since the time when I used to ring door bells and run.

[*To ROLLO*]

Don’t ask me how long ago that was, for I shan’t tell you.

ROLLO

[*With unction*]

You will rejoice to know, Mrs. Hoover, that Larry and I are on better terms than when you saw us yesterday.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Clapping her hands*]

Good, good, good!

[*To RACHEL, laughing*]

Did you do it, Rachel? Good gracious, how sorry you look!

RACHEL

[*Rising*]

I am sorry—if I look sorry.

[*Pause*]

You will excuse me if I go away and lie down?

[*She moves to the right, but stops when MRS. HOOVER speaks*]

MRS. HOOVER

[*Laughing*]

Of course we will—since you are going anyhow. Did you think you were asking a question?

[*She watches RACHEL with a sigh and a smile as she goes out on the right, and then looks quickly at ROLLO*]

Where is Alma?

ROLLO

[*Solemnly*]

I don't know.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Smiling*]

Do you care?

ROLLO

You know what I care for.

MRS. HOOVER

Are you going out?

ROLLO

I was going out.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Sweetly*]

For a walk?

ROLLO

[*Solemnly*]

Yes.

MRS. HOOVER

[*With another sigh*]

Well, if you go out, and Rachel goes away to lie down,

and Alma remains invisible, I see nothing left for me to do but to go home and play with the cat.

[She looks at ROLLO and laughs]

Kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty!—Oh dear, I wish I could curl up and purr for the rest of my life.

[The music ceases and the door of the child's room opens]

No, I don't either. Here is Mr. Larry . . . and I know he'll take care of me.

LARRY

[Coming out and closing the door]

Do you need my protection?

MRS. HOOVER

[With a shrug]

Not exactly, but I want to be amused. Rollo is too serious, and I was just about going to give up and go home.

LARRY

[Tapping his boots]

I heard your remark to that effect, and that's why I came out. And now you might suggest something for me to do—to amuse you.

MRS. HOOVER

Tell me a funny story.

LARRY

[Looking at ROLLO]

I know one.

MRS. HOOVER

Is it proper?

LARRY

Rollo liked it.

MRS. HOOVER

[To ROLLO]

Do you think I ought to hear it?

ROLLO

I don't believe my opinion will be necessary. I am going for a walk. Good afternoon.

[He goes into the vestibule and closes the door]

MRS. HOOVER

[Amused]

Good afternoon.

[To LARRY]

What in the world has happened to *him*?

LARRY

[Smiling]

That's a part of the story. Won't you take off your things and sit down?

[She obeys promptly]

MRS. HOOVER

[Sitting down]

Tell it.

LARRY

[With peculiar distinctness]

I'd much rather you would tell me, without reservation, that you don't mistrust me on account of my boots. You may be surprised to know that they are the property of your beloved husband.

MRS. HOOVER

[Delighted]

Stuart's boots! Does that coat belong to Stuart too?

LARRY

[Looking down at it]

No, the coat is all my own. Do you like it?

MRS. HOOVER

Very much—on *you*.

LARRY

[Brushing his sleeve]

Thank you. Being a bachelor, I am always puffed up when the women like my clothes.

MRS. HOOVER

[Amused and puzzled]

Of course you are. But why don't you get married?

LARRY

[Brushing the other sleeve]

I have thought of that too.

MRS. HOOVER

You would make a delicious husband—for somebody.

LARRY

Do you think so? Well, at the risk of seeming unconventional, I will tell you something that *I* think.

[She nods]

I think that some men and some women have about as much business being married as alligators would have—being vaccinated.

MRS. HOOVER

Thank you for calling me an alligator.

LARRY

I never called a lady an alligator in my life. Are you happy?

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing at him]

No.

LARRY

Still, you have a good husband?

MRS. HOOVER

An excellent husband—for somebody.

LARRY

And a comfortable home?

MRS. HOOVER

The roof doesn't leak.

LARRY

Stuart is kind to you, isn't he?

MRS. HOOVER

Oh, yes; but he would like me a little better if I were in Manchuria—or somewhere.

LARRY

[With quick persistence]

Then why don't you go to Manchuria—or somewhere?

MRS. HOOVER

[Promptly]

I would if I could.

[Feeling her way]

But I didn't think you would do this, Mr. Larry.

LARRY

Do what?

MRS. HOOVER

Remind me of my—I was going to say my poverty. But perhaps I had better say my circumstances.

[With a quick laugh]

They *are* circumstances, aren't they, until they begin to show through?

LARRY

[Smiling]

But you don't answer my question. Why don't you go to some place where you can be happy?

MRS. HOOVER

How can anyone be happy without money?

LARRY

[Thoughtfully]

Stuart hasn't much now, I suppose.

MRS. HOOVER

[Rather drily]

No, and Stuart doesn't seem to know how to make it.

LARRY

I don't believe Stuart will ever know how to make it.

MRS. HOOVER

You are encouraging, at any rate.

LARRY

[More earnestly]

That depends upon your way of looking at things.

MRS. HOOVER

[Glancing up at him]

At what things?

LARRY

[Laughing]

O, I don't know, exactly. Food, fans, hats, opera. . . .
I'm told that you are rather strong for opera.

MRS. HOOVER

[With suppressed interest]

But I can't have it here in Tadmor—unless I dream it.

LARRY

And I thought you liked money.

MRS. HOOVER

[Drily]

I have to dream that too.

LARRY

[Smiling]

Can you get it in that way?

MRS. HOOVER

[With a shrug]

Not often.

LARRY

[Casually]

Why don't you borrow some?

MRS. HOOVER

[Venturing]

How dreadfully much you want me to go away! Why don't you tell me so?

LARRY

I beg your pardon, but you told me yourself that you wanted to go away.

MRS. HOOVER

[Her eyes snapping]

And you feel absolutely sure that Stuart and Alma would live happily ever after?

LARRY

Happiness is a relative term. I have heard it defined as the absence of extreme want and of acute physical pain.

MRS. HOOVER

[With a thin laugh]

I wouldn't give two cents for that kind of happiness.

LARRY

Well, I hope that will never be necessary. But if you care so much for music, and the city, and all that sort of thing, I don't for the life of me understand why you don't have it.

[Smiling]

You needn't look at my boots, for they are merely an eccentricity of a childish mind.

MRS. HOOVER

[With excited wonder]

And the rest of you? Are you all a disguise?

LARRY

I hope not—quite.

MRS. HOOVER

Has Stuart known this all along?

LARRY

Since I came back. Stuart and Doctor Ben.

MRS. HOOVER

[With flashing eyes]

I'm awfully glad to know that you aren't really poor.

LARRY

[Smiling]

So is Rollo.

MRS. HOOVER

[Demurely, after a pause]

You make it very difficult for me to say anything.

LARRY

Then I'll try to make it easy.

[*He sits down at the table and writes a check, which he gives to her in a matter-of-fact way*]

There. Now if you were to receive a manuscript like that on the first day of each month, even in case of my death, how long would you be inclined to remain a prisoner here in Tadmor? Of course you could pay it back at your own convenience.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Getting up and fidgeting*]

But this doesn't seem possible!

LARRY

[*Smiling*]

It wouldn't have been at one time.

MRS. HOOVER

But when am I to pay it back?

LARRY

I told you at your own convenience. When you get ready. When you sing *Brünnhilde* and *Isolde*.

MRS. HOOVER

Please don't laugh at me.

LARRY

Then sing something else: "There is a fountain filled with blood." I don't care what you sing.

MRS. HOOVER

[With a shrug]

Don't be horrid.

LARRY

I'm not going to be. Where do you wish most to go? '

MRS. HOOVER

[Slowly]

The people I know best—or did know best—are in New York now.

LARRY

[Tapping his boots]

Well, New York is still on the map.

MRS. HOOVER

*[Unable to keep still]*And I can see it all before me at this minute. . . .
Broadway—Fifth Avenue—Central Park—

LARRY

[Smiling]

Don't forget the Aquarium.

MRS. HOOVER

You *are* laughing at me.*[Laughing herself]*

Well, I don't care.

LARRY

What do you expect to do when you get to New York?

MRS. HOOVER

Live—

[With less fervor]

and work, of course.

[They stand facing each other, about three feet apart]

LARRY

Sing?

[She nods]

Really?

[She nods twice]

Well, that's a good thing to do—sometimes. In the meantime, I suppose you would like to change that piece of paper for something of another color. Do you prefer these fellows?

[He gives her some yellow notes and tears up the check]

MRS. HOOVER

[After looking at the notes]

You dear good Mr. Larry. I have a great mind to kiss you.

LARRY

No, you'd better not do that. I'd much rather you'd write a brief letter to Stuart. Will you—at my dictation?

MRS. HOOVER

[Sitting down quickly]

Of course I will.

[Speaking as she writes]

"Dear Stuart."

[Slowly]

I wonder if I shall ever write that again?

LARRY

[Standing near her]

"You and I have lived together in Hades"—no, say "Hell." Have you got it?

MRS. HOOVER

[Writing vigorously]

Yes, I've got it.

LARRY

"—for ten years. I know that everything would go from bad to worse if we were to remain as we are, and I know that you will not shed many tears when I tell you that I am out of your life forever."—Now sign it, if you please.

MRS. HOOVER

[Soberly, after signing]

But I am not yet out of it.

LARRY

You may be by this time tomorrow. You won't be taking any great amount of Tadmor millinery along with you, I suppose?

MRS. HOOVER

[Rising]

Do you ever come to New York?

LARRY

I may go there again, sometime. I don't know whether I shall or not.

MRS. HOOVER

But you must. Shake hands and tell me that you will.
I'll send you my address.

LARRY

[Smiling]

I should advise you to do that.

MRS. HOOVER

[Holding his hand tightly]

I shall never know how to thank you, Mr. Larry.

[She continues to keep his hand and look at him with alluring eyes.

RACHEL comes in quietly from the right and watches the two as they stand together, her face drawn with anger and unhappiness]

RACHEL

[In a dry voice]

I trust that I am not intruding.

MRS. HOOVER

[Dropping LARRY's hand]

Why, Rachel! I supposed you were fast asleep and dreaming.

RACHEL

You need never suppose that—at this time of day.

MRS. HOOVER

[Reprovingly]

You talk as you did yesterday.

RACHEL

[Drily]

Is there any reason why I shouldn't?

MRS. HOOVER

I can think of ten thousand reasons why you shouldn't be miserable when there is no need of it.

RACHEL

[Wearily, with a touch of venom]

I dare say you are right.

MRS. HOOVER

[Laughing nervously]

Oh, you needn't believe anything that *I* say. But if I were a mother, I should be glad instead of sorry to know that my child was out of danger.

[She goes to RACHEL and lays her hand on her arm]

It wasn't nice of me to say that? I know it wasn't.

[Laughing]

But you do carry such a dreadfully long face.

[Holding one hand above the other]

It's as long as that. You talk as if there were nothing in the world but bears and griffins and things—to crunch us alive and eat us up.

LARRY

[Tapping his boots]

But we are going to drive all those bears and griffins and things back over the edge of Rachel's horizon. And that will have a tendency to make Rachel better natured and possibly to make her laugh.

MRS. HOOVER

[To RACHEL, *quickly*]

There! It was *he* who said that. I didn't say it.

RACHEL

I heard what he said.

MRS. HOOVER

And I hope you will try to believe it.

[*Holding out her hand*]

You don't like me very well today, do you, Rachel?

RACHEL

[*Taking her hand for a moment*]

I don't think you need worry much about that.

MRS. HOOVER

[*Slowly, with a touch of malice*]

I'll try not to.

[*Pause*]

Well, good-bye, Rachel. Good-bye, Mr. Larry.

[*She takes up her wraps. LARRY helps her on with them, and opens the vestibule door. There is an uncomfortable pause*]

LARRY

[*With a significance that puzzles RACHEL*]

Good-bye, Mrs. Hoover.

[*She looks at him with a strange smile that seems partly regretful and goes out slowly*]

RACHEL

[Quickly, as the door closes]

I wish that woman would go to the other end of the world and stay there for the rest of her life.

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

Maybe she will. She was talking just now about going to Manchuria.

RACHEL

[With anger and sorrow]

O Larry, Larry,—what a child you are!

LARRY

[With easy confidence]

There is no doubt about that. And you're another. All women are children, when it comes to seeing things in the dark—as you do.

RACHEL

[Going wearily towards the table]

You know a great deal about women, don't you?

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

No, not much. But I can almost always tell them when I see them.

“Flies in the milk I know full well,
I know the pear-tree by the pear;
I know the walnut by the shell,
And women by the clothes they wear.”

That was written by a Frenchman.

RACHEL

[*Bitterly*]

Larry, you speak as if life were a child's game.

LARRY

Well, it isn't—if I do.

RACHEL

[*Despairingly*]

Are you never to understand what life is?—what it means?

LARRY

Do you know what it means?

RACHEL

Yes. . . . I know.

LARRY

Then you ought to write a book about it.

RACHEL

Do you mean to drive me mad, Larry? Or, for God's sake, what *do* you mean!

LARRY

[*Cheerfully*]

Rachel, what in heaven's name do you think you are talking about now? Are you still worrying over that woman, as you call her? If you are, you had better take my advice and cease from doing her the honor of having her on your nerves. She isn't worth it.

RACHEL

[With difficulty]

Larry! Don't you know that every word you are saying makes me suffer as I should if you were to strike me with your own hand? . . . This makes the second time to-day that I have come into this room to tell you something, but I don't know whether I can do it or not. . . . I come back to do it, and I find you holding that woman's hand—and laughing.

LARRY

If I laughed at her when I had her all to myself, the chances are that I wasn't very far gone.

RACHEL

No matter about *her*. She isn't what I came to talk about. And you ought to know it.

LARRY

[Becoming more serious]

I do. Give me credit for that much, at any rate. Now, Rachel, if you knew what is going on in my mind at this moment, you would never again have any more doubt about me. Do you remember what you said to me a little while ago? You said you needed me—or you might as well have said it.

RACHEL

[Hopelessly]

Do I remember! . . . O Larry, don't!

[There is a knock at the street door. LARRY hesitates, looks earnestly at RACHEL, who has turned her back towards him, and opens the door, admitting STUART HOOVER. He looks at RACHEL inquiringly and then at LARRY]

LARRY

Well, Rachel, here is our friend Stuart.

[To STUART]

Rachel looks as if she were afraid of something—but she isn't.

RACHEL

[Covering a yawn and forcing a faint smile]

You mustn't mind me, Stuart, I'm always doing something that I ought not to do.

[She goes toward the child's room, meeting STUART and LARRY about half way between the table and the door. The three stop and are silent for a short time]

STUART

[With a dry laugh]

You can't be afraid of anything in this house, Rachel, and I'm mighty sure that you aren't afraid of me.

RACHEL

[With a strange earnestness]

How do either of you know what there is in this house—or in any house? Houses are the strangest things in all the world.

STUART

[As RACHEL goes to the door of the child's room]

Except the people who live in them.

[He frowns as if perplexed]

RACHEL

[Turning about, with her hand on the knob]

Yes.

[*Slowly*]

Or the people who do *not* live in them.

[*She looks at LARRY as she speaks*]

LARRY

[*With a forced laugh*]

Ghosts?

RACHEL

[*After a pause*]

No. . . . Not ghosts.

[*She goes in and closes the door*]

STUART

[*After a long sigh*]

There goes a vision of happiness for you.

LARRY

[*Tapping his boots*]

Stuart, the blind man.

STUART

[*Unbuttoning his overcoat*]

I could have said that myself.

LARRY

[*Laughing*]

Cheer up—and take off your coat. You are still young, and there's time for all sorts of things to happen. Maps of the world have been changed in less than an hour,—and there are twenty-four hours in each day.

STUART

[Throwing his coat over a small chair near the stove]

Aren't you sorry there are not twenty-five?

LARRY

[Touching him with his stick]

That means a pill for your liver.

STUART

[Sitting down carelessly in the rocking chair]

You needn't worry about me—or my liver. But I don't like the way Rachel looks—or the way she acts.

LARRY

[Sitting down by the table]

Neither do I. But there are going to be changes in this house, and the good God knows it's time. And you are expected to believe what I tell you.

STUART

I know about that. But I can assure you, Larry, that all this talk of yours about "silver cords," and "golden bowls," and other symbolic junk, has no more meaning for me than it has for Rollo. You assume that it has, but it hasn't.

LARRY

Come, come—be patient. By the way, your wife was here a little while ago.

STUART

[Rubbing his hands slowly]

Was she?

LARRY

She was.

[Smiling]

And that shade of blue that she has taken on is extremely becoming.

STUART

Then I must be very careful not to tell her so.

LARRY

[Laughing]

That means another pill for your liver.

STUART

[Getting up and moving about nervously]

Oh, it's all right for you to make jokes about this, Larry; but you needn't do it any more, for I don't more than half see them. I may as well tell you that I can't stand this kind of existence much longer. Sometimes I've a good mind to go away and hide myself in the middle of Australia.

LARRY

[Amused]

Emigration seems to be in the air today.

STUART

[Curiously]

What?

LARRY

Nothing. But what if I were to lasso you with my "silver cord" and pull you back to Tadmor?

STUART

[Sharply]

You might have to break my neck in order to do it.

LARRY

In that case, I wouldn't do it. But let me assure you right here, old fellow, that your neck is not going to be broken on your way back from the middle of Australia. And I speak now as a practical man of affairs—within limits.

STUART

There was a time when I thought *I* was going to be a practical man of affairs—within limits,—and in one way I came near to succeeding. I didn't have a chance to overwork myself with affairs, but I found all the limits.

[Wearily]

So you see, if a man can't do one thing in this life, he can do another.

LARRY

[Amused]

Or still another.

STUART

Go on. I was always an ass.

LARRY

Should I have taken you into my confidence if I had thought so?

STUART

[As if disgusted with himself]

Why not—so long as you knew that I could keep my mouth shut. A mud-turtle can do that.

LARRY

[Still amused]

You might forget your natural history for the moment, and pay more attention to what I am saying. I took you into my confidence, but I did not tell you everything.

STUART

[Drily]

No—not quite everything.

LARRY

[Getting up and stretching himself]

Not yet—but I am still confident.

STUART

Your confidence—in something or other—is very evident.

[He looks quickly to the right as ALMA enters from the lower door]

LARRY

Do I make a show of it?

[To ALMA, who comes to the table]

Do you think, Alma, that I make a show of my confidence—in something or other?

ALMA

I think you make a show of *yourself*—in those boots.

LARRY

Don't you care for them?

THE PORCUPINE 101

ALMA

I don't admire them.

[Taking up a magazine]

And I don't always admire the person who is wearing them.

LARRY

[Moving towards her]

Why these unsisterly remarks to the likes of one who has no friends? You ought to be sorry for yourself.

[Looking over her shoulder]

What are you reading?

ALMA

I'm looking at the pictures.

[Turning towards him and hitting his face with hers]

Go away!

LARRY

[Pointing down over her shoulder at a picture]

That one looks like me.

ALMA

[Drawing away and laughing]

If I were to tell you what you look like, you would wring my neck.

LARRY

[Gripping her neck with his fingers]

I wouldn't wring your neck for a thousand dollars.

[He tightens his grip until ALMA lets out a squeal that brings RACHEL from the door at the left]

ALMA

[Laughing]

Take him away, Rachel. He's choking me to death.

RACHEL

[Coming into the room]

Larry, what is the matter with you?

[Impatiently]

The minute you come into this house, you behave like one possessed.

LARRY

[With his arm around ALMA]

Of devils?

RACHEL

[With a sigh of despair]

Is there another house like this in all the world, I wonder?

LARRY

I can assure you that I never built one like it. If I did, Fillson would have an apoplectic fit—and probably go off in it.

RACHEL

[Sharply, and with a kind of interest]

What do you mean by that? You mean *something*.

LARRY

Didn't Rollo tell you about Fillson?

RACHEL

[Shortly]

No, Rollo did not.

LARRY

[Sitting by the table and tapping his boots]

Well, Rachel, this man Fillson is a very able fellow—and a good talker.

[ROLLO enters from the vestibule]

How are you, Rollo, you didn't walk very far.

ROLLO

[Pleased]

So you are talking about your friend Fillson, are you?

[Comes towards the table]

Does that mean that you are going to change your clothes?

LARRY

Not yet.

[Surveying the group]

But if I am even so much as the grand nephew of a third rate prophet, there is going to be a general changing of clothes in this house before the bobolinks are with us again.—By the way, Alma, do you know that you look like a sick pigeon in that dress?

ALMA

You had better change your boots, before you talk about my dress.

LARRY

I'm going to change them.

[Pointing at ALMA with his stick]

And you are going to change that. And Rachel. . . .
But the devil only knows what Rachel is going to do.

RACHEL

[Sitting down]

Do any of us know what we are going to do?

LARRY

Sometimes—if we live.

RACHEL

[With an effort]

There is always uncertainty, then, even with you.

LARRY

[Getting up and speaking with ironic deliberation]

Yes, my dear Rachel, there is. But we are not going to worship Uncertainty, and we are not going to get down on our knees and beg for Uncertainty to come and keep house for us. Stop me, if I am too cheerful; but at the same time, if I can instil the fertile essence of Hope into this happy household, for God's sake, let me do it. And whatever else you do, Rachel, don't put yourself between yourself and the sun any longer, and don't forever imagine that you see things with claws on 'em coming after you in the dark; for the chances are that they aren't coming.

[To the others]

And I'm not saying this to Rachel alone. You had far better—all of you—begin to get yourselves out of your own light, and cease to torment your long-bedevilled heads with the dark doings of bogies that have no real existence. That will be all, I believe, for this afternoon.

[Pause]

And now, Stuart, if you have nothing better to do, you

might come for "a short walk" with me, and possibly be of some help to me in my work.

[Smiling]

As a practical man of affairs, within limits, you ought to be interested in my work.

STUART

[Drily]

All right. I'm at your service.

ALMA

[With sarcasm]

Is this an alarming symptom. Isn't it rather early?

LARRY

It's well to be early.

[To ROLLO]

You remember how it goes, don't you, Rollo?

[Points at ROLLO with his stick and makes passes with it while he intones his text]

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern." . . .

[Laughing]

Is that the way it goes, Rollo?

RACHEL

[Slowly and very distinctly]

Are you quite sure, Larry, that your silver cord will hold all the weight that may come upon it?

LARRY

[With a frown of disappointment]

Quite—if there are no flaws in the silver.

RACHEL

[As before]

Let us hope, then, that there are no flaws in the silver.

LARRY

[Puzzled]

Let us hope so.

[Laughing]

Come along, Stuart.

[They go out together. ROLLO, RACHEL, and ALMA watch them as they go, and then gaze at the closed door behind them, as if fascinated.]

ROLLO

[Trying to laugh]

Is that fellow insane, or is he merely crazy?

RACHEL

[Looking at her hands]

I have a fear that Larry may be mistaken.

ALMA

[Troubled]

You speak as if you knew more than we do.

RACHEL

[Getting up and going to the table]

We shall all know more—sometime—than we know now.

ALMA

[*To ROLLO, with a quick laugh*]

Do you know what she means?

ROLLO

[*Moving to the right*]

Rachel has been a mystery to me for several years.

[*RACHEL gives him a searching look and turns away*]

Sometimes I call her my porcupine—on account of her sharp spines.

[*He looks at RACHEL kindly, but rather coldly*]

ALMA

[*Trying to laugh*]

I don't believe Rachel is a porcupine.

[*She embraces RACHEL affectionately, standing behind her*]

I don't believe a word of it.

[*She talks to ROLLO and laughs, while RACHEL tries weakly to escape*]

It's all nice and smooth and wiggly—like a seal. It might possibly have what-you-call-'ems—flippers—but it couldn't have spines.

ROLLO

[*Half way to the study door*]

The spines are there, whether you feel them or not.

[*He stands looking for a moment at the two women. RACHEL remains motionless, with her hands folded, looking down*]

ALMA

[After a long pause]

Good gracious! Has Rollo caught it too?

[ROLLO, troubled and in doubt, moves again towards the centre of the room]

RACHEL

[To ALMA, kindly]

You poor child.

ROLLO

[Coming nearer to RACHEL]

I was almost saying that to you, Rachel.

[He looks at ALMA with a slight but significant nod of dismissal]

ALMA

[Standing now between the table and the child's room]

Very well, Rollo. But don't try to make Rachel laugh this afternoon. I know by the way she looks that she isn't going to do it.

[She pauses, and then goes into the child's room]

ROLLO

[Rather heavily]

Rachel, I know you think that I owe you an explanation; and it may be possible that you owe something of that kind to me.

[Affecting a lighter manner]

I wonder how it would work out if we were to do our best to explain ourselves to each other, and then to make an inventory of what we have left. Larry and I have had a talk, as you know, and from now on we are going

to be friends. And Larry wants you and me to be friends—instead of being merely man and wife.

[*Pause*]

Won't you say something?

RACHEL

[*Looking around her, as if in a cage*]

Yes, Rollo. I'll say that you and Larry, between you, are going to drive me mad.

ROLLO

[*Bewildered*]

Mad?

RACHEL

[*Choking*]

Not yet.

ROLLO

But, Rachel! You poor Rachel!

RACHEL

[*With difficulty*]

Yes—you may call me that now, if you like to. I don't suppose it makes any difference what any of you call me now.

ROLLO

[*After an uncomfortable pause*]

I wonder, Rachel, if there is another human being like you on the face of the earth.

[*With a sorry attempt at levity*]

What do you think about that yourself?

RACHEL

[Speaking with great effort, as she arranges things mechanically on the table]

Please don't make me talk now, Rollo. For I'm not—I'm not very well. I know I haven't made you happy; and I deserve to have suffered. But don't make me talk now. Don't make me suffer any more than I must.

ROLLO

[Throwing up his hands in despair]

Good Lord in Heaven! . . . The women in this house!

[RACHEL stands and watches him as he moves away and into the study on the right]

RACHEL

[To herself, in a low and frightened voice]

This house! This house!

[She stands watching the door that ROLLO has closed. She trembles, and her face is drawn with pain and fear. Finally she goes to the book case, takes the vial from behind the old book on the top shelf, and looks at it intently. Then she looks towards the child's room, shakes her head sorrowfully, and puts the vial back. After a weary gesture of despair, she moves slowly towards the child's room. She comes to the door, and while her hand is on the knob the curtain falls.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same room, nine o'clock the next evening. DR. BEN BAKER is sitting by the table, smoking. ROLLO BREWSTER is standing between the table and the stove, with his hands behind him. There is a worried expression in his face.

DR. BEN

[With careless impatience]

Rollo, whenever I smoke in this room, I feel as if I were fumigating the office of a Female President. Are you sure it's all right?

ROLLO

[Solemnly]

Ben, if I speak with you concerning a very personal matter, may I be sure of your confidence?

DR. BEN

[Brightening]

I'm a jay-bird of a doctor, if you can't. If I were to tell everything I know, how long do you think I'd be allowed to peddle poison here in Tadmor?

[Looking at his watch]

But you'll have to hurry up. I'm due now at McGillicuddy's.

ROLLO

Ben, I'm the most unhappy man on earth.

DR. BEN

I don't like to contradict a schoolmaster, but you are nothing of the sort.

ROLLO

[Putting his hand to his head]

You don't know! You don't know!

DR. BEN

[Rather cynically]

Eye-strain?

ROLLO

[With emphasis]

No.

DR. BEN

[Grinning to himself]

Well, I know that much, at any rate. And you'd better tell me the rest.

ROLLO

[Coming nearer]

It is what you said about the women in this house—or partly that.

DR. BEN

Did I say too much?

ROLLO

Ben, you didn't tell me whether you could help Rachel, or whether you couldn't.

DR. BEN

[As if surprised]

I help Rachel? What do you take me for?

ROLLO

[Embarrassed]

Of course I don't really expect you to give her anything in the way of a—er—specific. . . .

DR. BEN

That's lucky for me.

ROLLO

[Apologetic and insincere]

But mightn't there be something in the way of a—a general restorative—a tonic—a nerve-food, perhaps?

DR. BEN

[With rough irony]

Do Rachel's nerves live on the American or the European plan?

ROLLO

[After a gesture of despair]

Ben!

DR. BEN

[Blowing a large cloud of smoke]

Well?

ROLLO

[Slowly]

Do you know what is the matter with Rachel?

DR. BEN

[After a pause]

No.

[Looking up]

Rollo, I may as well tell you that Rachel is not a subject

for my kind of care. I wish I could do something, but I can't.

[Giving him a searching look]

You see, Rollo, when you began this evening, I thought you were going to talk about the Blue Lady, as Larry calls her.

ROLLO

[Unhappily]

Well, I was.

[With effort]

Do you believe, Ben, that—well, we'll say anything that I have done—has been enough to make Rachel the wretched and unapproachable woman that she is?

DR. BEN

[With irony]

Rachel is a very serious person, Rollo,—and the old order has a way of not changing much when she's mixed up with it.

ROLLO

[With effort]

Has it ever changed?

DR. BEN

[Getting up]

You might have a talk with Larry about that. He has more settled views than I have,—and he's done more travelling.

ROLLO

Yes—yes,—you avoid the subject, I see.

DR. BEN

[Taking his coat from a chair]

You had better have a talk with Larry, Rollo, and then tell him to have a talk with Rachel.

[Getting into his coat before ROLLO can assist him]

Now that Larry plays the part of a financier, he may be able to brighten her up a little. You aren't going to tell me anything, I see.

[He moves towards the vestibule door]

ROLLO

Plays the part?

[Almost faltering]

You don't mean to tell me that Larry is no better off than he appears to be?

DR. BEN

[With a dry laugh]

You needn't worry about that.

[LARRY enters from the vestibule. He is well dressed in ordinary business clothes and wears a fur trimmed overcoat. He carries the same yellow stick as before. ROLLO looks at him with satisfaction]

DR. BEN

[Buttoning his coat]

How are you, Larry?

[Grinning]

Do you want a ride this evening?

LARRY

[Hanging his coat in the vestibule]

Thank you, Ben, but this place will do very well for a while.

[He taps his leg with his stick and looks at ROLLO]

How are you, Rollo?

DR. BEN

Where are your boots?

LARRY

They are still in existence.

[He comes nearer to the table]

DR. BEN

[Grinning to himself]

Well, good night.

LARRY

[Amused]

Where are you going, Ben?

DR. BEN

[At the vestibule door, with dry emphasis]

I'm going to make out McGillicuddy's bill.

LARRY

[Laughing]

Good for you.

[DR. BEN looks at LARRY, then at ROLLO, grins again to himself, and goes out. ROLLO comes nearer to LARRY]

ROLLO

Larry, I realize that I have done you a great injustice.

LARRY

No matter about that now. Besides, it was more than half my fault, anyhow.

ROLLO

[Suavely]

But you must not think for a moment that I fail to appreciate your own good fortune, or that I fail to regret my unpardonable lack of courtesy in the past.

LARRY

[Laughing]

Now to the devil with your apologies and with your unpardonable lack of courtesy in the past. You and I aren't going to make faces at each other any longer, I hope; and we aren't going to waste any more time in raking over dead ashes.

ROLLO

[Putting his hand to his forehead]

Dead ashes! . . .

[Putting his hands behind him]

Well, Larry, Ben doesn't give me much encouragement in regard to Rachel.

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

How much does Ben know about Rachel?

ROLLO

[Shaking his head and sighing]

Not very much—I suppose.

[He takes a few steps, heavily, with his hands behind him]

But there's one thing, Larry. I don't believe there's much in what I told you yesterday about. . . .

[*He stops*]

LARRY

About Stuart's wife?

[*ALMA enters quietly from the right*]

Then you and Ben have had a talk about the Blue—

[*He sees ALMA*]

the Blue—

[*Pretending not to see her, and making grimaces as he speaks*]
—the Blue—it may have been the Blue Alsatian Mountains, or the Blue Danube. I rather think it was the Blue Juniata. Old Eben Imbro used to sing that song when he was drunk, and I haven't heard it since. "Wild roved an Injun girl, Bright Alfarata." The old boy used to sing it, and he used to shed tears. I couldn't have been more than four or five years old.

ALMA

[*Coming forward*]

Are you any older now?

LARRY

[*Turning*]

I believe, Alma, that you and Rachel could fall together down two flights of stairs and not make noise enough to scare a cat. How are you?

ALMA

[*Smiling*]

But we might shed tears—like old Mr. Imbro. I am very well, thank you.

LARRY

Why do you look at me like that? Do you miss my boots?

ALMA

Because you are almost presentable. What has become of Ben?

LARRY

[Taking her by the ears]

The Wild Man of Borneo has just gone along. You may never see him again.

[RACHEL enters from the left and stops]

In which case, you will be sorry that you didn't marry him when he asked you.

[He lets ALMA go]

RACHEL

[To LARRY, with forced carelessness]

So you have decided to dress like a human being at last, have you? Did you think you were deceiving me?

[Wearily]

Look at that hand.

LARRY

[Looks at his hand and turns it over]

Why—yes; I suppose I did—more or less. May I ask why you have been so still about it?

RACHEL

[Glancing at ROLLO]

I don't know. I may have had a reason.

LARRY

*[To ROLLO, after studying RACHEL with amusement]*Well, Rollo, what are *you* thinking about?

ROLLO

[Solemnly]

I have much to think about. I have felt for some time past that something is going to happen.

LARRY

[Cheerfully]

Well, if it's going to happen, we'll have to let it happen.

ALMA

Do you understand these people, Rachel?

RACHEL

I am not sure that I do.

ALMA

Well, I'm sure that I *don't*; and if they aren't going to tell me what they mean, I'm going to bed.

ROLLO

Alma, don't be so impatient. Nothing is going to happen this evening to disturb you.

ALMA

How do I know that? The house may burn down.

RACHEL

This house will never burn down.

LARRY

[Laughing]

Well, Rachel, you might have shouted the glad tidings a little more joyfully, it seems to me.

[Offering her a chair]

Don't you think you had better sit down?

RACHEL

[Sitting down]

Are you trying to make me laugh again?

[She smiles faintly]

LARRY

[Patting her head]

No, but you might look a bit more cheerful, all the same, for I can hear someone at the door. It is probably a homicidal incendiary.

[Turning about, as STUART HOOVER enters]

No, it isn't. It's Stuart.

STUART

Good evening.

[To LARRY]

So you have come out at last.

LARRY

I am as you see me.—What's the matter? You look as if you had won a case.

STUART

[Trying not to smile]

I haven't, but I have brought some news.

LARRY

Good, or bad?

STUART

[Taking off his overcoat]

My wife has run away.

LARRY

You poor devil.

ALMA

[Astonished]

Why, Stuart! What do you mean?

LARRY

[To ALMA]

He means that his wife has run away.

ROLLO

[Gasping]

But are you sure that you have made no mistake? This is terrible.

LARRY

Of course it is.

RACHEL

[Frowning]

Larry!

ALMA

[Her voice trembling]

But why don't you let Stuart tell us what he has to say?

ROLLO

[Carefully]

By all means, Stuart. Are there no—particulars?

STUART

[Returning from the vestibule, where he has hung his coat]

Yes, there is one very particular particular, and I have brought it with me.

[Takes a letter from his pocket and gives it to ROLLO]

There. Tell me what you think of that.

LARRY

[After watching ROLLO's expression as he reads]

What's the matter, Rollo? Is it written in Esperanto?

[ROLLO looks at LARRY severely; LARRY turns to STUART]

Well, Stuart, did she leave any regards?

STUART

[Drily]

No, but she left almost everything else.

[With unconscious innocence]

I found the cat lying on what I should have called her best dress.

LARRY

It looks to me as if you and the cat would have to match nickels for that dress.

ROLLO

[Looking from the letter to STUART]

My dear Stuart, of course there is no need of my assuring you—

STUART

[Quickly]

Oh no,—none whatever.

ROLLO

[Reading again]

This is most astonishing—most astonishing.—Really, you must all excuse me, for I must think this over.

[Impressively]

It may not be too late.

STUART

[Drily]

For what?

[They watch ROLLO as he goes to the study and disappears]

LARRY

[With a sigh and a shrug]

Well, Rollo is going to think it over.

[Taking letter from the table]

May I read this?

STUART

[Suspiciously]

Oh yes, you may read it. And then you may tell us all how you like it.

LARRY

In that case, here goes.

[Reads aloud]

“Dear Stuart: You and I have lived in Hell together for ten years.”

[To STUART, sympathetically]

That's too long. That's altogether too long.

[*Reads*]

"I know that everything would go from bad to worse if we were to remain as we are, and I know that you will not shed many tears when I tell you that I am out of your life forever.—Louise."

[*Pause*]

What do you think of that, Rachel?

ALMA

It might be best if we were to let Rollo do the thinking.

[*LARRY smiles on her approvingly and nods*]

STUART

[*Glancing towards the study*]

Rollo will have to do some pretty heavy thinking before he brings Louise back to Tadmor. When she tells me that she is out of my life forever, she isn't asking me to meet her at the station.

[*To RACHEL*]

You needn't look at me like that, Rachel; and you needn't ask me to make a funeral of this business. For I can't,—that's all.

[*They watch RACHEL as she goes to the child's room and disappears*]

LARRY

[*With a sigh and another shrug*]

Now *Rachel* is going to think it over.

STUART

[Looking from the door to LARRY]

Does she expect me to set up a wailing and a gnashing of teeth over this affair? Won't you try to make her understand my feelings a little? I haven't been myself for ten years; and I have still to find out how much of me there is left.

LARRY

[Very distinctly]

I fancy that you and Rachel are pretty much alike, so far as that goes. From all that I can gather, *she* has not been herself for ten years.

[Smiling faintly]

And she doesn't expect you to wail or to gnash your teeth.

STUART

[Reluctantly]

I know. But I shall never understand Rachel if I live to be two thousand years old.

LARRY

Oh, cheer up. You imagine things.

STUART

I wish I could imagine what she expects me to do.

[Pause]

LARRY

[With less confidence, as he moves towards the child's room]

Well, Stuart, I'll try to find out what she has to say for herself. And in the meantime you are to remember

that everything in this life has to change, sooner or later, —one way or the other. It's hard, sometimes, to get that simple fact into our simple heads.

[He looks at STUART and ALMA as he pauses at the door. He knocks lightly and goes in]

[STUART takes up the letter and pretends to read it. ALMA looks at him furtively over the top of a magazine from across the table]

ALMA

Haven't you made out that letter yet?

STUART

This letter doesn't appear to interest you to any great extent.

ALMA

[Smiling]

On the contrary, I call it one of the most interesting letters ever written. And I thought Larry read it very well,—didn't you?

STUART

[Drily]

Larry's elocution was entirely satisfactory.

[Frowning]

And I am not going to ask Larry any questions—this evening.

ALMA

[Looking at the magazine]

I shouldn't, if I were in your place.

[Looking up]

But whether you ask Larry any questions or not, I have a great mind to ask *you* one.

STUART

I'll answer it with pleasure—if I know enough.

ALMA

Well then, I have a great mind to ask you how it feels to be—deserted.

STUART

[Impulsively]

Why don't you ask me how it feels to be. . . . But I'd better stop. If I say anything at all, I shall say too much. . . . Alma, you may think whatever you like this evening, and you may say whatever you like, but for God's sake do me the kindness—if not the justice—to say to yourself that I'm not the fellow that you used to know—or any relation to him. Before long I shall begin to know whether or not I can bring that fellow back to life again; and then perhaps you will tell me to what extent you recognize the talented young idiot who used to lie awake nights, and listen to the rain on the roof, and think of his highly commendable future plans.

[ALMA laughs at him]

Well, what's the matter with you now?

ALMA

I haven't heard you say so much as that—all at once—since the time that you were talking about.

[She becomes suddenly serious]

STUART

[With tacitless self-depreciation]

You mean the time when I used to be myself. I don't suppose I was much to gather roses for, even in those days, but I was at any rate myself. And if I could have foreseen what was coming to me—my failure in the law, and that fool marriage in addition. . . .

ALMA

[Quietly]

I have never looked upon that as a marriage.

STUART

[As before]

The devil only knows what it was. But it's over now, and it's gone; and I suppose the best part of my life has gone with it. I suppose that was a part of my education. Some of us require more schooling than others—and we get it.

ALMA

[Looking at the magazine]

Ten years would seem to be rather a long course in that school.

STUART

You said that as if you didn't hate me.

ALMA

[Frowning]

I shall not *like* you—if you say that again.

STUART

You might have married.

ALMA

[With a forlorn laugh]

I know it. Let me see.

[Counting her fingers]

One, two, three, four, five, and—funny little Judge Lunt, with his red nose. I might say five and a half, but that would be wicked. . . . There are some women who can't say even five—if that's a thing to be sorry for.

STUART

And there are some women who are too good for more than one man in ten thousand.

ALMA

[Laughing nervously]

And he seems always to escape.

STUART

Then you ought to be glad that Larry is your brother.

ALMA

That wasn't the right thing for you to say.

STUART

I know it—but I said it all the same. Very likely I shall continue to say things like that for the rest of my life.

ALMA

I hope not.

STUART

And I can't help knowing that you are never going to have the same opinion of me again that you had once.

ALMA

Possibly not—if you make me see too clearly why I shouldn't.

STUART

[Studying her face]

You didn't mean very much when you said that. You said it as if you were trying to make me laugh.

ALMA

Aren't we always trying to make somebody laugh—in this house?

STUART

Do you think Larry will succeed in making Rachel laugh?

ALMA

[Putting her finger to her lips]

Be careful.

[LARRY comes out of the child's room. His manner is grave, irritated and disappointed, but his face brightens at the sight of STUART and ALMA]

LARRY

[With subdued humor]

Well, Stuart, are you becoming reconciled to your desolation?

STUART

[Putting the letter into his pocket]

I'm not going to ask any questions, and I'm not going to answer any questions—this evening.

[He moves towards the vestibule]

Good night.

[Putting on his overcoat]

Good night.

LARRY AND ALMA

[As he goes out]

Good night.

LARRY

[Rubbing his hands thoughtfully]

And so there's one more poor devil—going home to a flameless hearth and a hungry cat.

[Pause]

And *here*—is our good friend Rollo.

[ROLLO comes out of the study in a state of dejection]

Well, Rollo, have you thought it over?

ROLLO

[Sadly]

Yes, I have thought it over.

LARRY

You are not very enthusiastic.

ROLLO

[Putting his hand to his head]

Possibly not. I should like to know what others have to say.

LARRY

Do you mean Rachel?

ROLLO

Yes; and I mean you, as well as Rachel.

ALMA

[Still at the right of the table]

I don't seem to be included. Perhaps I'd better go to bed, and count sheep.

ROLLO

You are included as much as any of us, Alma; but just at this time I would rather. . . .

ALMA

[Moving to the right]

You needn't say any more. Good night, Rollo. Good night, Larry.

[She smiles and goes out slowly]

ROLLO

[Watching ALMA as she disappears]

I am beginning to understand, Larry, hard as it is for me to say it now—that I shall have a great deal to thank you for in the future.

LARRY

[Laughing]

No more of that.

ROLLO

You know, of course, without my telling you, that I am going through fire. But I ask you to believe, with me,

that I shall come out of it a stronger man for the work that lies before me.

LARRY

My dear fellow, you are going to be a regular Shadrach.

ROLLO

You may say that, if you like; but I don't believe that I shall fail, unless it be in one direction.

[Glancing towards the child's room]

And with your assistance, I may succeed, even there.

LARRY

[Rather drily]

I understand you, Rollo.

ROLLO

[Going towards the door]

I knew you would understand me.

[He knocks lightly]

Are you there, Rachel?

[RACHEL comes out and looks at the two men as if frightened]

RACHEL

Are you two alone?

ROLLO

[Giving her a chair]

We are. And now, my dear Rachel,

[His manner becomes more studied and oratorical as he continues]

I wish to tell you, before Larry, that I shall depend from now on upon your assistance, and upon your belief in my

power to carry on the work that I have undertaken. There has been some talk in the town—some very idle talk—and there will be more; but people do not talk forever, even here in Tadmor.

[LARRY *grins and applauds silently*]

How much you are able to forget, I do not know. But you can tell me—you will tell me—you must tell me—how much you are willing to forgive. And you must understand my—my position, if we are to work together,—as you must understand my—my purpose, if we are to live together.

[*He wipes his forehead*]

RACHEL

[*With difficulty*]

You don't know what you are saying, Rollo, when you ask *me* to forgive. . . .

[*She looks hopelessly at LARRY*]

ROLLO

I might have known. I might have known.

RACHEL

No—no! I shouldn't have said that. You don't understand. You can't understand. I only mean, Rollo, that I cannot help you very much. I would do anything for you—or everything, if I could—but I can't do much now. . . . I am not very strong now. . . .

ROLLO

And yet, you don't say that you forgive me.

RACHEL

I forgive everybody.

[Bitterly]

Why shouldn't I forgive everybody?

ROLLO

[Going slowly to the right]

Well, Rachel, I will not ask you to say more this evening.

[Coldly, with a sigh of weariness]

I will leave you alone with Larry. You may find it easier to talk with him, and you may come to view things through a clearer glass tomorrow.

[He goes to the lower door, which he holds open while he waits]
Larry.

LARRY

Well, Rollo?

ROLLO

Try to—try to make her laugh. Good night.

LARRY

[Drily]

Good night, Rollo.

[ROLLO goes out and LARRY stands looking down at RACHEL, who leans forward with her elbow on her knee]

LARRY

[With forced humor]

Rollo still wants you to laugh.

RACHEL

[Leaning back]

O, you children! . . . You poor children!

LARRY

[Seriously]

Yes, Rachel,—that's just about what we are—children. The best and the worst, the wisest and the silliest of us—children. Tumbling, blundering, groping children,—getting our heads bumped and our fingers burned,

[She gives him a quick, frightened look]

and making ourselves generally uncomfortable. But all this needn't keep us from growing, or from looking now and then as if we had not committed the unpardonable sin in being born.

RACHEL

[Looking at him]

What else are you going to say to me?

LARRY

Didn't Rollo say enough?

RACHEL

I listened while he spoke to me. What more could I do?

LARRY

You should know better than I. Aren't you his wife?

RACHEL

[Despairingly]

I don't know *what* I am.

[She leans forward and covers her face with her hands]

LARRY

[Mechanically]

You married him, didn't you?

RACHEL

[Crushing her handkerchief in her fingers]

Larry, I want you to promise me something.

LARRY

[As before]

Is it something easy?

RACHEL

[With difficulty]

I am going to ask you to promise me that you will always be good—always be good—to the child.

[She looks to the left]

LARRY

[Trying to laugh]

Of course I'll be good to him. I've promised you that already.

RACHEL

[Looking up at him]

And remember that he cares for you—so much—oh, so much more—than he cares for me.

LARRY

Pardon me, Rachel, but now you are—why, you are talking nonsense. . . . Aren't you his mother?

RACHEL

[Choking]

Yes.

LARRY

Isn't—isn't Rollo good to him?

RACHEL

You must know that he doesn't care for Rollo as he does for you.

LARRY

[Beating his palm with his stick]

I have tried *not* to know it.

[He moves about restlessly]

RACHEL

[Getting up slowly and looking at him]

Larry.

[He nods]

Is there anything else that you have tried not to know?

[She speaks very distinctly]

LARRY

Rachel, a fellow would need an interpreter to understand you this evening.

RACHEL

Have you tried not to know—

[She stops, her voice broken with pain]

Have you tried not to know that there are flaws in the silver—the silver cord—that you have said so much about?

THE PORCUPINE

LARRY

[Frowning]

Is this your notion of trying to help me?

RACHEL

I would help you if I could, Larry.

LARRY

[Goes half way to the stove and stops, speaking slowly]

So you think, do you, that my "silver cord" may not bear the strain that will be put upon it? You said something like that yesterday and I was sorry to hear you say it. For if you refuse your assistance, I—

[With a shrug]

well, I don't know. . . .

RACHEL

How can I refuse what I do not have to offer?

LARRY

[With a sorry laugh]

Well, if you have determined that I shall fail. . . .

RACHEL

[Very earnestly]

I have determined nothing, Larry. I am only unfortunate enough to see already what is not clear to you.

[Going nearer to him]

Dear Larry, don't you know that men like you—men who would set the individual apart from the community—are always—almost always—disappointed?

LARRY

[*Carelessly*]

Do you call Tadmor a community?

RACHEL

[*Simply*]

I call Tadmor a part of the world in which you and I are living.

LARRY

[*Rubbing his chin*]

Hum! That was an easy one, wasn't it?

RACHEL

Larry, whatever you have done since you came back, or whatever you may hope to do, I know you mean to do what you think is right.

[*Wistfully*]

But perhaps it doesn't matter so very much what you mean . . . now. For life is not so simple as you would have it, or so easily changed. I may not know very much, but I know that life is not so simple as you would have it.

LARRY

Well, Rachel, you seem to be doing the best you can to keep *your* life as it is. Don't you know, my dear child, that everything is going to be different after this?

[*Glancing towards the window*]

Don't you know that a certain woman is out of the way, and that Alma is going to be happy at last, and. . .

RACHEL

[Unhappily]

What will become of Rollo?

LARRY

[Puzzled]

That was a strange question for you to ask.

[Pause]

Rachel, you don't care for Rollo as you should.

[He speaks without conviction, and with effort]

RACHEL

[Crushing her handkerchief, and trembling]

I do not love him—no. . . . I do not even like him. . . .
I never did—and I never can. . . .

LARRY

[With an incredulous frown]

Then why in the name of Satan did you marry him?

RACHEL

[Struggling with her emotion]

I married him because I was—because I was afraid! I married him because I was mad!—and all alone! O Larry, that was the worst of it—I was all alone. I didn't know! I was afraid! I thought of you all the time, and I wanted you—you—you! There was nothing else for me in all the world but you—and you were gone! And I didn't know where you were for more than a year. There was no one left but you—and you were gone. I was mad!—I told Alma that—and you were in that room. . . .

LARRY

[*After a pause, during which he stands looking at the door of the child's room*]

Good God! . . . What have I been doing since I came here! What have I been saying! . . . I knew nothing about it—and I ran away!

RACHEL

[*As before*]

Rollo wanted me—but I almost made him take me. I was afraid, Larry! I was mad—mad—mad! . . .

LARRY

[*Taking her hands*]

Are there others who know this?

RACHEL

Alma knows it.

LARRY

And Rollo?

RACHEL

I don't know. . . . I have not made him happy.

LARRY

[*Taking her hand*]

Rachel,—won't you look at me?

RACHEL

[*Looking at him*]

Yes. . . . If anything should happen to me, Larry—I am not very strong—you will tell Rollo some time—you will have to tell him some time—and your boy will go

with you—wherever you take him. . . . He will be happy with *you*. . . .

LARRY

[With new determination]

Of course he will—and so will you. Don't we all belong together? Don't you know that you are going with us?

RACHEL

[With better command of herself]

If you had stayed—ten years ago—I would have gone with you to the ends of the earth. . . . But you didn't stay—and you didn't know.

LARRY

[Slowly]

You are right, I did not know.

[He goes to the child's room, looks in, and closes the door softly]

He is asleep now.

[They go towards each other, meeting between the table and the door]

RACHEL

Don't wake him,—let him sleep. And some day let him know . . . some day when I am gone.

LARRY

[Putting his hands to her cheeks]

You poor child, what do you think you are saying now?

[Smiling]

You and I are not going to be struck dead by thunderbolts.

[He lets her go]

RACHEL

Thank you, Larry—you mean to be good to me,—but I—I seem to have lost the threads of everything.

LARRY

[Promptly]

But I have *not*. And there's where my "silver cord" comes in.

RACHEL

[With pathetic insistence]

I have lost my hold on everything now, Larry—or it seems as if I had—on everything except my life-long love for *you*.

[With reckless frankness]

Do you know what I mean?—my love—my life-long love for *you*!

LARRY

[Bitterly]

Was it like this when I ran away from you?

RACHEL

[More quietly]

You never did run away from me. You could never have gone away—if you had known. . . . But you did not know—and so you went away.

LARRY

[With energy]

I did—God help me!—and now I have come back for you again.

RACHEL

[Shaking her head slowly]

Oh, Larry, there is so much that you do not know.

LARRY

I know the laws of this State—or one of them. And fortunately there is one more important thing that I know; and that is that you and the boy are going to leave this ghost-ridden old landmark and come with *me*. If you are worrying about Rollo, you needn't do it any longer. Rollo needs a—what does he call it? Oh yes, a change of air. You needn't worry about Rollo.

RACHEL

[Hopelessly]

No—I shall not—any more.

[Pause]

Tell me something, Larry—

[Touching his sleeve]

Tell me if you knew—*then*—how much I loved you!

LARRY

[Frowning]

I don't believe I knew much of anything—then.

RACHEL

[Her voice trembling]

Do you know how much I love you *now*?

LARRY

[Trying to smile]

What the devil do you expect a fellow to say when you ask him a question like that?

RACHEL

[Sorrowfully]

No, you don't. You never can. You have never loved me very much, you see, and that is why you will never be able to know.

LARRY

[With obvious difficulty]

But how do you know how much I have—loved you,—or how much I love you now?

RACHEL

If you loved me now, you would not ask me that.

LARRY

Well, what's the use of my saying things, if you aren't going to believe them?

RACHEL

There is no use, I suppose.

LARRY

[After examining the head of his stick]

Then let me tell you something that you can believe, and must believe.

[With sincerity]

Let me tell you that the rest of my life is in your hands, at your command, and at your service. All that I have,

all that I am, and all that I can ever make of myself, will be for you, and for him.

[*He looks at the door of the child's room*]

And if the future that I am setting before you now seems to you to be in the nature of a hard lot, I wish in heaven's name that you would tell me what sort of flower-show affair it is that you take this human life of ours to be. Now, Rachel, I'm not very good at saying things when I'm really in earnest, but surely I have said enough to make you decide for yourself whether you and I are going to be wise and happy, or whether we are going to be silly and miserable. . . . Didn't I tell you there was a way out of this?

RACHEL

[*Looking towards the window*]

When you said that, you were thinking of that woman.

LARRY

I was thinking more of you.

RACHEL

I know what you mean, Larry, but you must listen. . . . Listen to me, Larry; and try to remember—sometimes—how much I have loved you, all these years. You will never know how much, but you will remember me—sometimes. Not so often as you think you will, but you will remember me, for you *must*. . . .

LARRY

[*With kind irony*]

And you are sure that I *must* listen to you?

RACHEL

[With less conviction as she goes along]

You tell me there is a way out of this, and I know that you believe what you are saying. And I know too well that I have not made Rollo happy. . . . But I married him; and marriages are made, for better or for worse, before God. . . .

[Her voice breaks, with a note of almost indignant protest. She sinks into the chair again, and covers her face with her hands.]

LARRY

[Looking down at her]

They may be sometimes, but I know of several that must have been made when He wasn't looking.

[He puts his hand to his chin and continues to watch her. She does not look up at him until the child calls]

VOICE OF THE CHILD

Uncle Larry! Uncle Larry!

LARRY

[With an eager change of manner]

There! Do you hear that? He knows all about it—all about your false reasoning, and your self-tormenting superstition.

[Rapidly]

Don't you know what he wants? He wants *me*. He wants me to fiddle to him, and he doesn't want a dead march either.

[Putting his hands on RACHEL'S shoulders and shaking her gently]

The wise little beggar!

RACHEL

*[Painfully]*Yes, Larry, it is *you* that he wants.

LARRY

He wants me, and he wants *you*.

RACHEL

[Touching her eyes with her handkerchief]

He doesn't seem to—know me—very well.

LARRY

[Patting her shoulders]

Rachel, what do you think you are talking about?

RACHEL

*[Getting up and looking into his face]*Don't you see that I am alone?—*alone?* . . . O
Larry! . . . Larry! . . .

LARRY

You will never be alone again while I am alive.

[He leans forward and touches her forehead with his lips. She draws away from him slowly, as if half afraid, and looks into his eyes. Then she looks at the floor. He watches her and smiles very kindly.]

VOICE OF THE CHILD

Uncle Larry! Uncle Larry!

RACHEL

There!—go! . . . He wants you.

[She covers her eyes with her hands and her body trembles]

Go—go—go!

LARRY

[Tapping her arm lightly with his stick and laughing]

All right,—I'll go. And you stay here.

[With mock warning]

Be sure you don't run away.

[He takes a few steps to the left, and RACHEL holds out her hands towards him]

RACHEL

[Choking]

Wait, Larry!—Wait!

LARRY

[Stopping and turning about]

Why—what's the matter now?

RACHEL

[Bewildered and helpless]

Nothing. . . . Nothing.

[With assumed strength]

Go—go! He wants you.

LARRY

[Greatly troubled, but forcing a laugh]

Yes . . . and I'm going.

VOICE OF THE CHILD

[Within]

Uncle Larry!

LARRY

[Looking back and smiling]

Do you hear him?

[He takes a few steps backward, still looking at her]

Now be sure that you stay where you are till I come back.

[He shakes his finger at her, repeating his admonition once or twice silently on his way to the door, and disappears into the child's room, leaving the door ajar. In a few moments he begins to play "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch" with a great deal of spirit, while RACHEL stands gazing at the door. Presently she begins to move slowly to the bookcase, stopping at times, but always drawn on again as if by a mysterious and irresistible force. She takes the vial from behind the books, returns to the table, and, after a long pause, drinks the contents, shivering as the music becomes more spirited. Then she begins to move slowly towards the door of the child's room, still drawn as if by a power outside herself. She reaches out with her arms and whispers LARRY'S name. LARRY, within, plays faster and faster, while the curtain falls slowly]

CURTAIN

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